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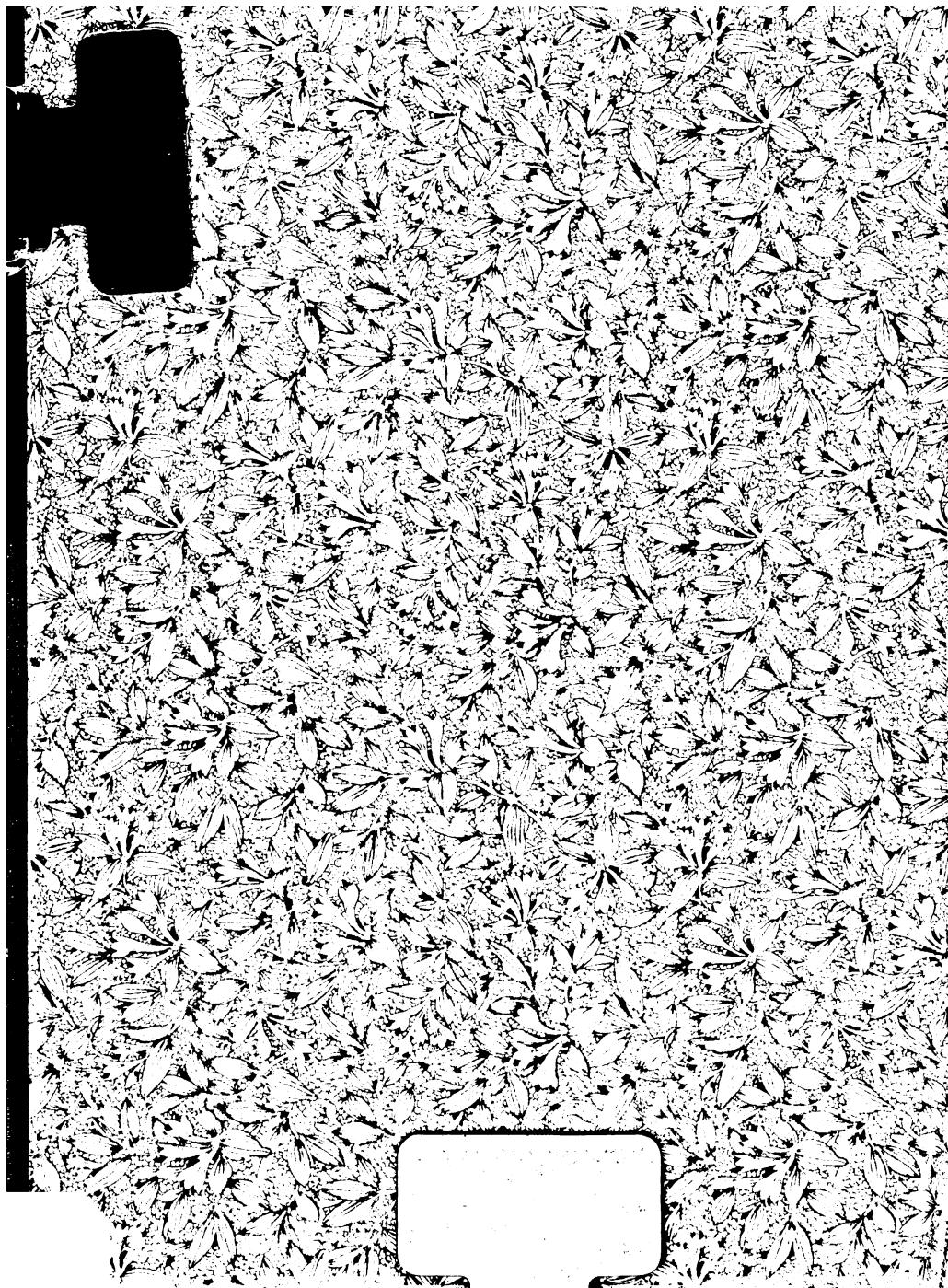
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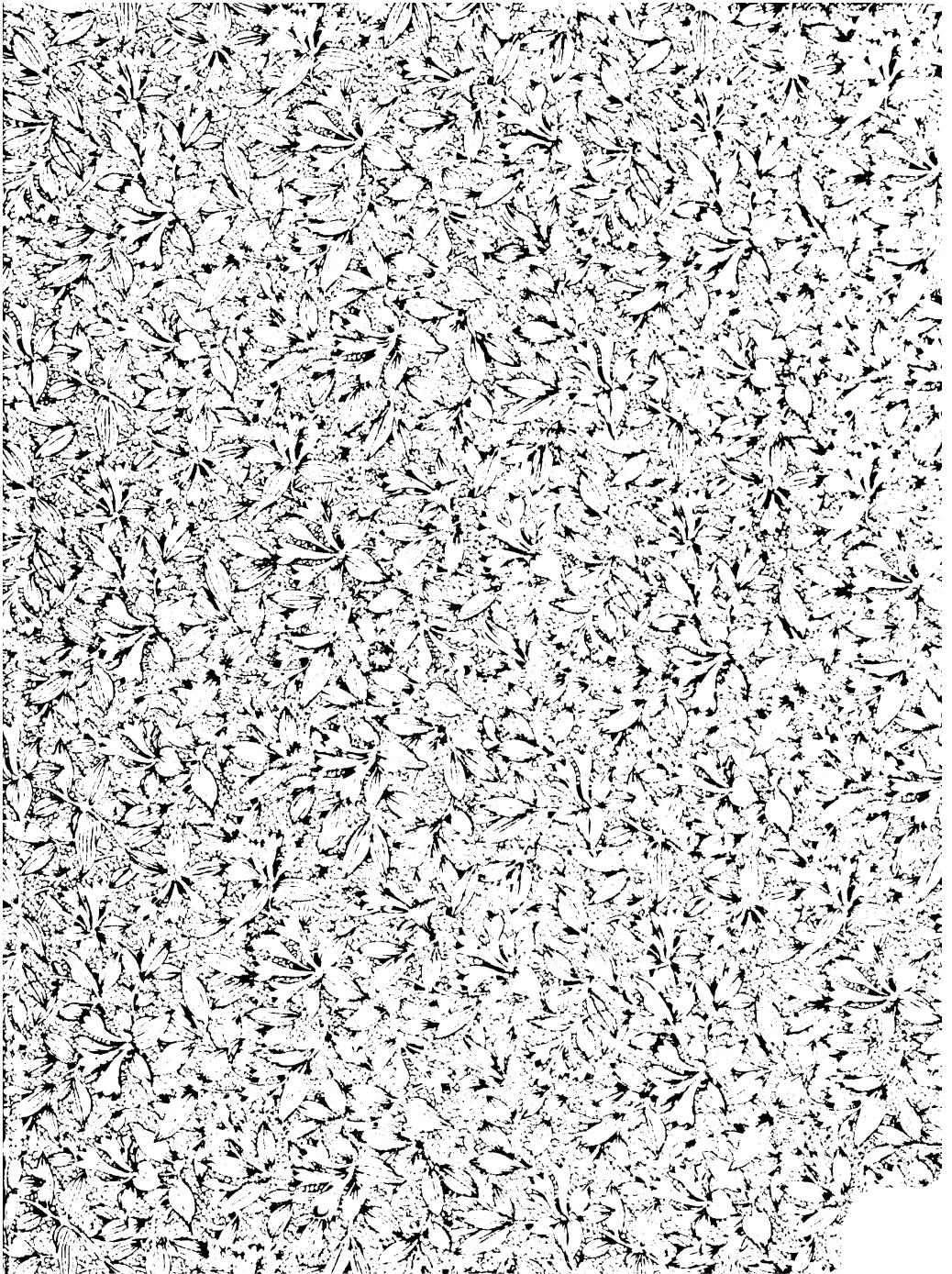
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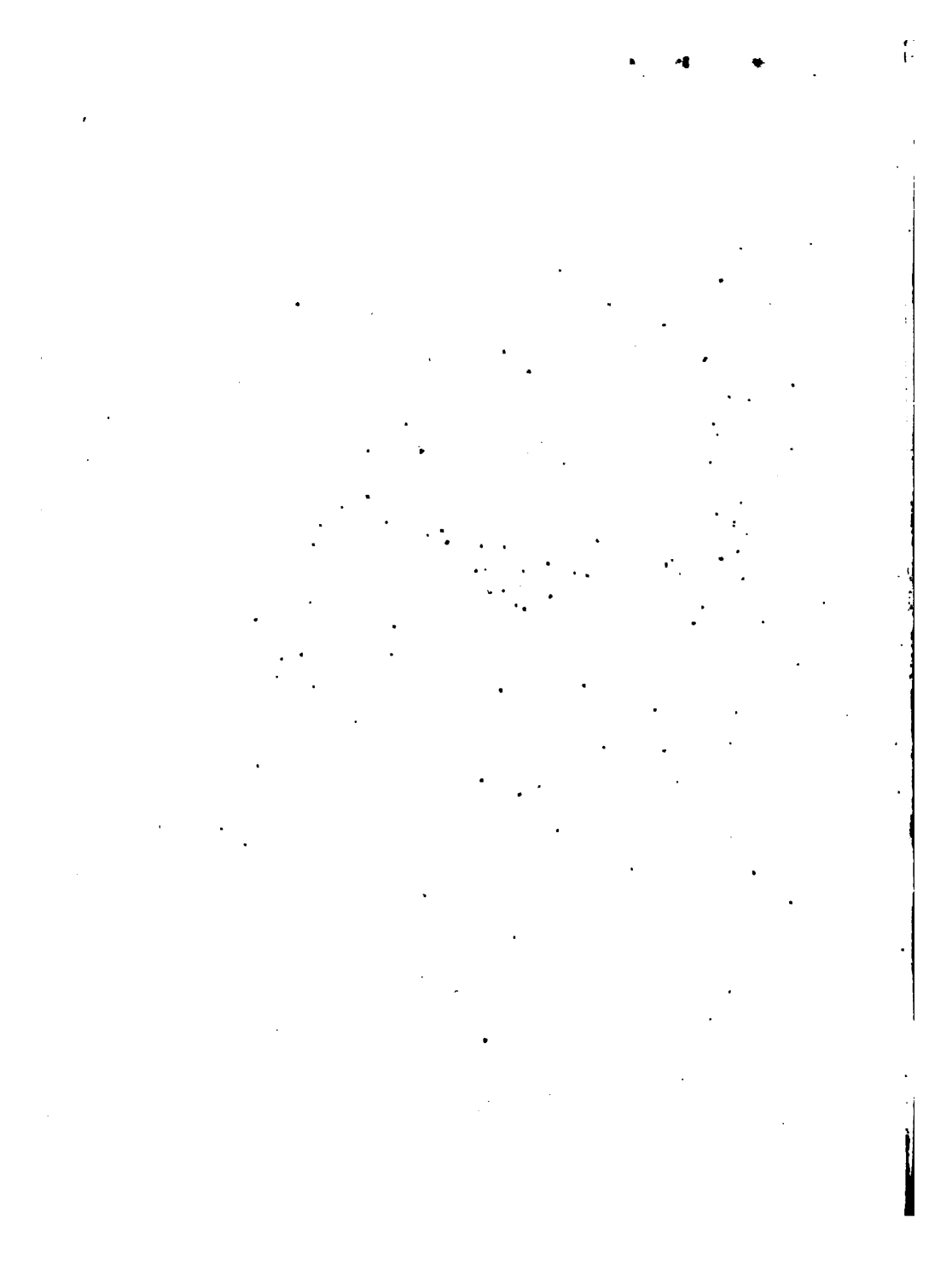
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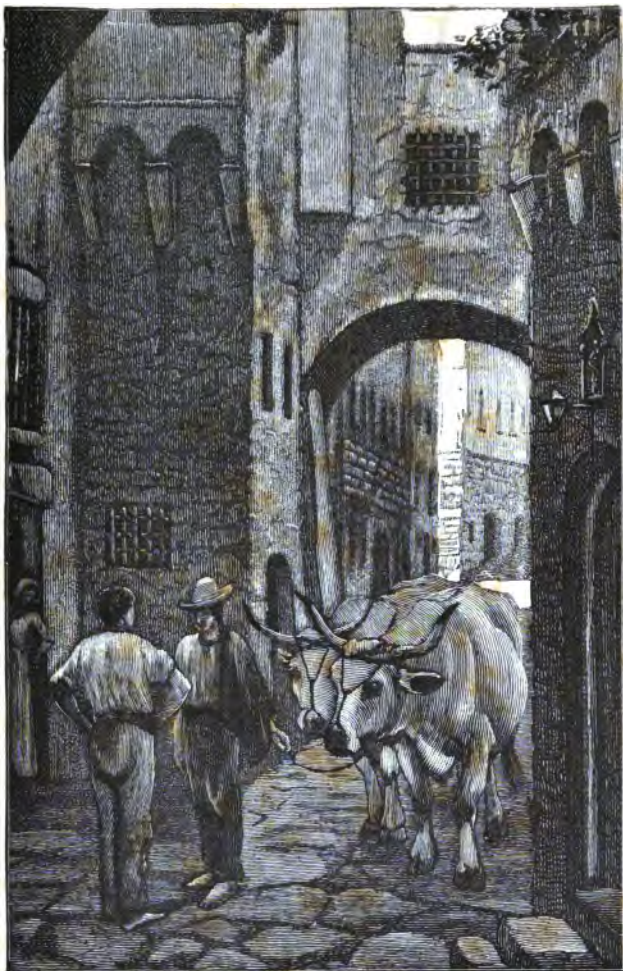
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STREET SCENE, SIENA.

THE VENTNIX WATERS

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ON
TUSCAN HILLS
AND
VENETIAN WATERS

BY
LINDA VILLARI
Author of
“IN CHANGE UNCHANGED,” “IN THE GOLDEN SHELL”

ILLUSTRATED BY MRS. ARTHUR LEMON

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On Tuscan Hills

I.

A TUSCAN VILLA

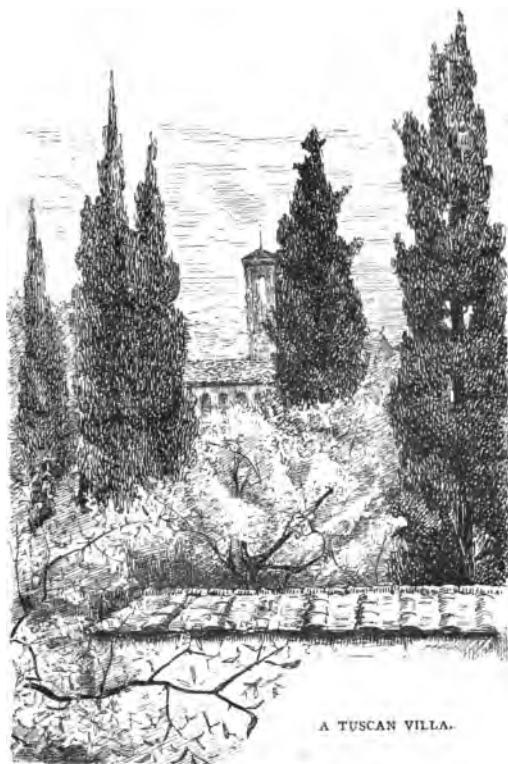


A Tuscan Villa.



ON a spur of the steep hillside beyond Settignano, four miles to the north-east of Florence, stands the Villa Gamberaia. It is a sturdy, oblong mansion, facing the western sun. It is two-storied, brown-roofed, and its lower windows are sternly barred. From either end of its eastern front balconied arches stretch out like arms, and lead by hidden stairways to the chapel at the corner of the avenue, and the garden on the southern side. And though these

arches are plainly an after-thought, and out of harmony with the grand severity of the main building, they are not unpleasant to the eye, and add to the quaint charm of this rural palace. The Gamberaia is a typical villa of the late Renaissance period, and its founder, Messer Zenobio Lapi, whose grim portrait decorates the saloon, must have been a man of lordly tastes as well as substance. No position could have been better chosen, no outlay spared in planning its groves and gardens. It clings midway on the olive-clad slopes rising from the basin of the Arno to the pine-fringed ridge that sweeps round from Monte Ceceri to Compibbi; and its ilex woods and cypresses interrupt the soft monotony of the grey-green foliage above and below its terraced walls. It is approached by a precipitous lane from Settignano; a range of giant cypresses guards its gates, and it has an avenue of the same trees clipped to a broad flat surface about ten feet from the ground. There is a great grass terrace before the western front bordered by a low wall

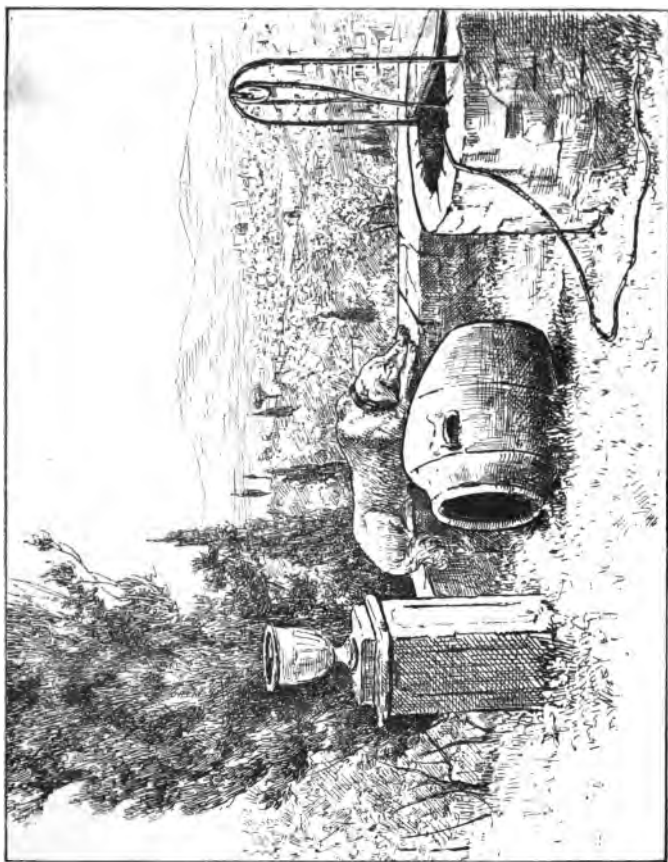


A TUSCAN VILLA.

set with stone dogs and lions, and commanding a glorious prospect. You look down on the City of Flowers across a sea of greenery—olives and vines and gardens and cornfields ; you see all its gracious coronal of tower-capped hills, its branching valleys to the south, a stretch of plain dotted with towns and villages innumerable, a gleam of the river here and there, and curve beyond curve of mountain lines, crowned by the translucent Carrara peaks, and the advanced guard of the Central Apennines still whitened by lingering snows. In the foreground to the right, across an interval of olives and corn, a white-belfried church crowns the hill of Settignano ; while the pine-clad ridge beyond, and the amphitheatre of Maiano, with the massive tower of Mr. Leader's villa below Vincigliata, are delightful details of the middle distance. And this view, beautiful as it is in mere outline, wears a different charm at every hour of the day. In early morning Florence is a faintly tinted bas-relief against a background of vaporous hills ; towards evening its domes and

cupolas are as dusky jewels set in a verdant cup ; at sunset it is flooded with golden light, while the sky to the south and east is luminous sea-green or delicate blue besprinkled with carmine cloudlets fading to ashes of roses. Or perhaps storm banners are abroad, and the lurid orange light to the west is barred with black and grey.

Our sky scenery is ever new, just as the fleeting cloud-shadows for ever change the face of our hills. Dearest of all moments, perhaps, is when the after-glow has burnt out and the value of every mountain line is clearly defined, and pine and cypress are intensely black against the sky. For then the great dome of Santa Maria del Fiore assumes a gloomy grandeur. Florence is a city of mystery, and you scarcely rejoice when gleaming chains of yellow light again transform it into a smiling abode of men. Neither from Bellosguardo nor Fiesole nor other well-known posts of vantage does Florence wear so pictorial an aspect. No meanness of modern stucco, no cross lines of chessboard streets are visible



THE VAL D'ARNO FROM THE TERRACE.

from this Settignano hillside. Beyond olives and vineyards you see the city clasping the river, worthily crowned by Brunelleschi's dome and Arnolfo's tower, and with all lesser spires and belfries grouped in graceful order.

But this grand outlook is not the only charm of our Gamberaia. The house itself is an ideal summer abode, with great vaulted rooms round a cloistered court, whence a doorless stairway on either side gives straight, steep access to the upper floor. The lofty entrance-hall looks to the west, and measures about eighty feet by thirty. This also opens on the courtyard in a straight line with the eastern gateway, so that a fine current of air is always to be had. Its scanty furniture is in keeping with the architecture: straight-backed chairs and huge tables of mediæval build, and great battle-pieces and portraits by old, if deservedly unknown artists. Sundry mysterious recesses and secret stairs in the walls are suggestive of past romance, and from one of the enormous cellars stretching under and around

the house runs a subterranean passage communicating with the upper garden. This, however, has been long blocked up.

Several of the doors are surmounted by Latin inscriptions, setting forth how the mansion was built in the year of our Lord MDCX, by Ser Zenobio Lapi, and how it was enlarged and completed by his descendants some fifteen years later. After changing hands several times, it became a possession of the Gondi, then passed to the Counts Capponi, who sold it to a French gentleman, to whose family it still belongs. It is said to have been a Medici villa, but the well-known balls are absent from the various escutcheons on the walls, and there is no historic record of their ownership. It is true that a Gamberaia was numbered among their estates, but there are three other villas of that name in the neighbourhood of Florence. Even the derivation of the word is uncertain. Some say that the ground was once held by the Gamberelli family; others that a little lake formerly existent in the valley below and

well stocked with *gambere* (crayfish) was the origin of the title. The only historic personage who has any discoverable connection with the Gamberaia is one of our own times. Napoleon III. inhabited it for some months when he was Prince Louis Napoleon. His father lay ill in Florence, and for political reasons he was not allowed to reside in the city. He must have known sounder slumber in the quiet yellow chamber to the south than he ever slept afterwards amid the imperial splendour of the Tuileries.

Whether the Medici had a hand in them or not, certainly the grounds of the Gamberaia were planned on a princely scale, and with various dividing walls and stout iron gates that, together with the secret passage, show a princely regard for personal safety.

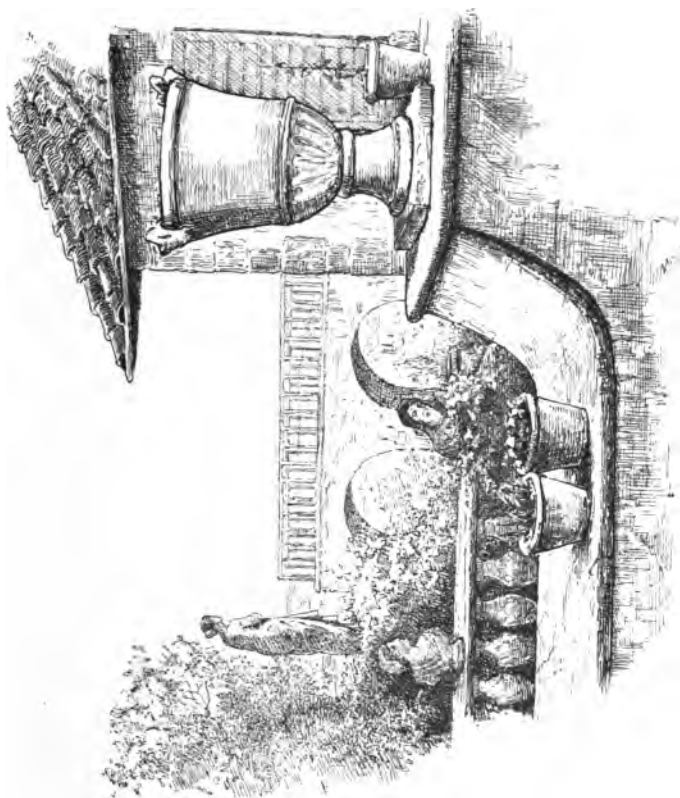
The eastern front looks on a narrow lawn nearly four hundred yards in length. At one end, behind neglected rose-beds, broken fountain and rockwork, rises a screen of mighty cypresses a hundred feet in height. At the other is a statue-decked balustrade

overlooking a billowy sea of olives, a reach of the Arno, and a delicate interchange of hill and valley. This long stretch of lawn is one of the prides of the Gamberaia. No other villa far and near can boast so great an extent of level space, and beyond the vase-crowned wall of the upper garden, it is bordered by a close box hedge, on which three persons might easily lie abreast.

“God Almighty first planted a Garden. And indeed it is the Purest of Human Pleasures. It is the greatest Refreshment to the Spirits of Man.” Thus Lord Bacon, and there was much at the Gamberaia to remind us of the statesman’s ideal pleasaunce. For it is duly divided into three parts, and has a “greene” at the entrance, although of far smaller extent than the four acres prescribed by our author. Likewise it has two fair alleys of grass hedged with clipped box and cypress that give out their fragrance to the sun ; and, instead of covert alleys, has groves of ancient ilex trees with gnarled and twisted trunks. One of these lies open to the

east and "looks abroad into the fields," and over rolling olive slopes to the turn of the hills by Compiobbi. It has evergreens "rounded like Welts," though these have expanded in course of years into monstrous globes of foliage. And in the middle of the main garden, where vines and vegetables, fruit-trees and Egyptian wheat are bordered with pink and red roses, there is a fountain where Cupid on a dolphin "sprinkleth water" on the goldfish below, and can on occasion shoot jets of spray almost as high as the eaves of the house. Across the grass, and directly opposite the eastern door, is a narrow enclosure of the true rococo style. It has miniature flower-beds and paths; a fine oval fountain of granite, with graceful handles, set in a circular carved basin, decorates the alcove at its end. Stone deities and troubadours are set in niches round its walls and draped with climbing weeds, while two dainty flights of steps on either side communicate with the ilex wood and the upper garden. Great bushes of lavender guard these steps with

their fragrant spikes, and roses lean down from the trellised arbours that are fit entries to the treasury of flowers above. For there lilies and carnations, heliotropes and geraniums are ranged in tempting order, and, with hundreds of lemon trees in huge earthen vases, crowd the air with a symphony of scent. Pomegranates are putting forth their buds of flame, and the rose-oleanders coming into bloom by the wall that is crowned with tall white lilies. Here, too, is a large fountain with a "fair receipt of water," peopled with goldfish and over-grown with water-lilies. And when the sun beats too fiercely on these flowery terraces, a gate by the empty orangery leads to the second ilex wood, where the light plays pretty tricks among the glossy leaves, and you look down a vista of twisted trunks to an open space, framed in dark greenery, that might well serve as the set scene of some classic idyll. And by this cool descent you find your way, through another gate, back to the long lawn by the rose-festooned cypress trees.



THE VILLA TERRACE.

This summer Paradise, musical with bird voices and the hum of bees, is as secluded from the world as if forty miles, instead of four, divided it from Florence. Only one small villa lies beyond it; then nothing but olives and corn, and one or two scattered cottages, right up to the crest of the hill above Compiobbi. There, by a ruined chapel of the Holy Cross, where a few cypresses point to heaven, you overlook another reach of the Arno, a cluster of picturesque villas, crowding summits, and the dark woods of sweet Vallombrosa nestling in the folds of the hills below the sun-baked curves of the Consuma Pass.

In searching for local romance we learnt that the archway spanning the little lane at our gates was supposed to be haunted by a spinning ghost, and that the country folk did not willingly pass through it after dark. It was disappointing to be also told that the legend originated in a trick played by a boy years ago, and recently confessed by him to the owners of the Gamberaia. But superstition is hard

to kill, and the Settignano peasantry cling to many primitive beliefs. They place rosemary in their windows to keep away evil spirits ; they prefer the charms and nostrums of a wise woman down in the valley to the scientific treatment of the local doctor ; and they ascribe cholera and all epidemics to the effect of poisons wilfully scattered by government agents.

Settignano itself is a delightfully pretty and well-to-do village, or rather—I beg its pardon—fraction of the township of Fiesole. The road to it from Florence has no suburban ugliness. It winds through fields and vineyards, and climbs the ascent among the olives with no walls to impede the spreading view over hill and valley. Runlets of clear water trickle down beside low hedges of sweet-briar ; poppies and gladiolus and love-in-the-mist are ready to your hand among the corn, and brown-roofed farms emerge from a sea of greenery. The carriage road proper ends on the triangular piazza, where a realistic statue of Tommaseo suggests

sympathy with modern thought, and a much-mutilated monument to Septimius Severus records the mediæval belief that that emperor was the founder of Settignano. As a matter of fact, it can boast a far older origin, on the testimony of ancient inscriptions that have been dug up close by. One rough, paved track leads through the village to an outlying mountain hamlet, another dips down to the Gamberaia.

The people of Settignano are thriving and energetic. They have a little open-air theatre where performances are often given, and they are slowly erecting another on a more ambitious scale. They still preserve traditions of art; and if no great sculptors are born among them as in the days of Desiderio da Settignano, or their foster child, Michelangelo Buonarotti, they have an inherited facility for working in stone and marble. They are also very skilful in Florentine mosaic, and nearly every house has its wheel and bench for the cutting of gems. The big mosaic manufactory near the

Villa Michelangelo has given much development to this delicate industry.

The church is not interesting. It has a curious old pulpit of grey granite, but its many pictures are below mediocrity. But the neighbouring chapel of the Misericordia contains one of Desiderio's best works, a bas-relief of the Madonna and Child executed in his daintiest style.

But the artists of Settignano must not make me forget the musicians of the Gamberaia. Spring was late, and the nightingales were still in full song towards the end of May. They dwelt in the ilex groves, and

"never elsewhere in one place,
I knew so many nightingales."

Their jocund voices gladdened our days and nights. We seldom saw "their bright, bright eyes," but even in the stillest hours of hot summer noons there was always a pleasant domestic stir among the nests overhead in the thick green foliage. And about an hour before midnight their evening concerts would begin—

“ With skirmish and capricious passagings,
And murmurs musical and swift jug, jug,
And one low piping song, more sweet than all,
Stirring the air with such a harmony
That, should you close your eyes, you might almost
Forget it was not day.”

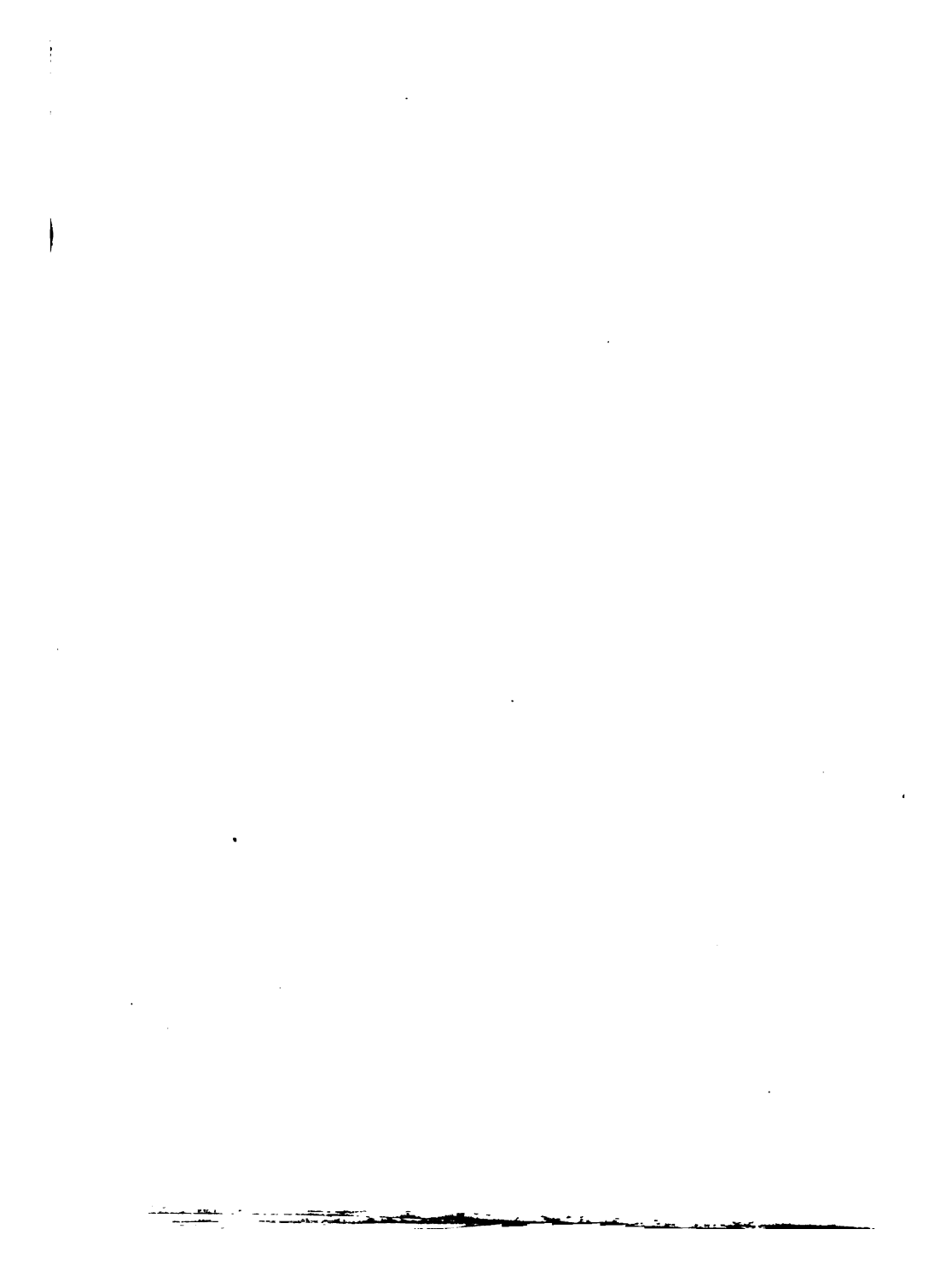
But as time went on their tuneful voices were less often heard. Even nightingales are oppressed by family cares, and, like young ladies, apt to give up their music after they are married. The blackbirds, however, were untiring singers, and continued to greet us with their sweet if flippant love duet. One sings, “ *Ben mio ti vedo ;*” the other replies, “ *Se tu mi vedi, vieni a me*”—“ I see thee, my sweet.” “ If thou seest me, come to me.” But in English the words scarcely fit the pretty strain.

The passage from spring to summer was a leisurely pageant this year. When first we came to our Tuscan villa the fields were fringed with the azure flames of the scented iris ; we saw the corn plots change from blue to yellow-green, and then to tawny gold ; we saw haymakers tossing the fragrant

grass that was all ablaze with poppy and gladiolus ; and we saw the long swathes of bearded wheat fall before the reaper's sickle. The clamorous *cicale* sawed all day, as though grinding the heat ; crickets chirped all night ; hot mists rose from the plain ; summer lightning flashed from the skies ; and the last fireflies—they go with the corn—wove their gleaming devices in the air. The starlit terrace became our evening saloon, and the songs of the young girl with the guitar leaning against the stone lion on the wall were often interrupted by the cry of the screech owl or the softer note of the dark bird that flew so heavily down from the roof to the olives below. But all things must have an end, and just as the young swallows were learning to fly, we looked our last on the glittering, bright city and dusky hills ; and then in the haze of early morning drove down our cypress avenue, bound for windswept heights long miles away from Villa Gamberaia.

II.

BARGA





Barga.¹



WENTY miles to the north of Lucca, nine from Lucca's well-known baths, is a little mountain town, which not one traveller in a hundred thinks of visiting. Yet, historically, artistically, and archæologically, Barga is interesting enough to be worth a longer deviation from the beaten track. In the first place, its position is almost unrivalled for natural beauty. Perched on the southern spur of Monte Romeccio, itself an outwork of the Garfagnana Apennines which divide Tuscany from Lombardy, it commands

¹ This article originally appeared in *Fraser's Magazine*, and is now reprinted by kind permission of Messrs. Longmans.

a vast extent of the lovely valley of the Serchio, and faces that most majestic mountain the Pania alla Croce and the panorama of the northern flanks of the Serravezza and Carrara ranges. The great dome of the Pania towers above all other peaks, and although of no tremendous altitude—being only seven thousand feet above the sea level—is very grand in outline and effect. To its left is the fantastic Monte Forato, pierced by a natural arch. The opening is near the summit of the pinnacle, and seen from the terrace of Barga cathedral might be a stray half-moon caught in its fall from the sky. It is said that on one day of the year the sun sets immediately behind this opening, which then yawns like the portal of a world of flame. And if we lower our glance from this noble line of peaks into the Serchio valley and towards the barricade of mighty hills walling it in from Northern Italy, the eye rests in all directions on the loveliest details of Italian landscape. It is mountain scenery shorn of all austerity; nature the mother, not the step-mother.

Directly opposite, across the Serchio, is the little town of Gallicano, crowned by a lofty church tower, and backed by the steep cliffs through which the Turrita torrent cleaves its way to the river. Hemp and vines and Indian corn, and patches of pasture and woodland enamel the valley below in varied shades of greenery. A succession of wooded ridges and spurs invade the land, dive here and there into deep ravines and start up in cypress-crested crags. All things speak of peace and plenty. Substantial cottages are dotted about on all sides; villas and towers, hamlets and villages, climb far up among the chestnuts on the slopes behind the town. These mountains are no destructive tyrants, but rather sheltering guardians to whom their human children lovingly cling.

The ridge-like promontory, on which Barga stands, is guarded on either side by a torrent coursing through a deep ravine. Round the greater part of its walled circuit the ground falls precipitously; indeed, behind the town the mule path from the

second of its two gates crosses the gorge on a narrow causeway. The chief gate is on the high road, but you cannot drive through the archway ; for no vehicle may enter Barga. But as the last two miles and more are a steep and continuous ascent, it is well for the horses that their work ends perforce at the gate. From this point also we command the wondrous prospect of domes and peaks and jagged crests, illumined by the shifting lights of a stormy August afternoon. But this is by no means our first visit, and we know that grander still is the scene from the terrace before the church.

Looking at the stern and narrow gateway of the town, we think of all the vicissitudes it has seen, how often it has been thrown open to admit a conquering host ; how often, too, the gallant men of Barga have joyfully rushed through it after some brilliant repulse of the invading forces. Was not the great Condottiere Piccinino himself signally routed on the ridge without and compelled to raise the siege of Barga in ignominious haste ? For this

little town, that in official parlance is no town at all, but simply a *castello*, has stood an unusual number of sieges, more indeed than many far more important places.

But it is hardly fitting to recount Barga's fortunes outside her gates. First let us take the reader inside and through her steep ways, and into her churches and up to the *Arringo*. Then, perhaps, he may feel some interest in the tale of this warrior eyrie, which, as the key of the Garfagnana district, was always a bone of contention between Church and Empire, Guelph and Ghibelline, Lucca and Florence.

To the right of the gate, where the walls are highest—those walls that have more than once been breached, and once at least razed to the ground—is the Pallone ground ; and graceful players in white frilled tunics are enjoying a quiet practice with the huge leather balls before the game fairly begins. There had been a great match, we were told, on the previous day, and all those turf seats ranging to the

top of the bastion yonder, where that fine cedar of Lebanon spreads its branches, had been crowded with spectators. The old-world game of Pallone is well suited to this old-world Barga; and we can imagine how generation after generation of similar holiday crowds have trooped through the gate to see Pallone played, whenever times were quiet and no Lucchese or Pisan marauders were ravaging the country side.

Mounting a steep and narrow street—wide in comparison with many of the rest—and lined with substantial stone mansions, some of which boast Venetian-Gothic windows—threading one or two zigzag lanes and skirting part of a high wall, tufted with maidenhair and capers, we soon reach the Cathedral Piazza, locally known as the *Arringo*. The title explains itself. Barga is poor in piazzas; space was precious in the days when it was dangerous for men to plant their dwellings outside the walls, among the cypresses to the front or the chestnuts at the back of the town, and this wide terrace

and the level greensward along the Duomo's flank, commanding the whole mass of Barga's roofs, was undoubtedly the best possible spot on which to harangue (*arringare*) Barga's people in all public emergencies.

The men of Barga, a hardy, vigorous race, tall of stature and famed in all time for their love of freedom and martial spirit, were well aware of the military importance of their citadel, and by no means willing to bend before the tyranny of Lucca. It is only necessary to glance over the wide extent of hill and valley, mountain passes and winding river course visible from this breezy terrace, to understand why the possession of Barga should have been so hotly contested by rival States ; and why, when it was finally incorporated in the dominion of Florence, that jealous Republic should have swerved from her traditional policy of harshness towards subject towns, and granted Barga so many exceptional privileges.

But a sketch of Barga's vicissitudes must be given

later, for now the great door of the cathedral is open, and the afternoon sun is sending shafts of golden light up to the high altar. This *chiesa maggiore*—commonly styled the Duomo—is a massive, imposing structure of considerable architectural pretensions, and has exercised the ingenuity of all the archæologists who have visited it. It is to the kindness of two of these gentlemen, Dr. Carina and Mr. Charles Heath Wilson, that I am indebted for many of the following particulars.

Of the origin of the church nothing certain can be ascertained, save that up to the year 1390 it was much smaller than it is now, and was dedicated to St. James and St. Christopher. It is said to have been built upon the remains of a Pagan temple, but neither upon this head can any exact information be obtained.

To the older portion of the church, including the façade, Mr. Wilson assigns the date of the eleventh century. This is very interesting in character. It is built of irregular blocks of rich yellow travertine,

much wasted by time, and has seven arcades of engaged columns on shafts. The architrave of the main entrance is of marble, and carved with rudely-executed scrolls of the Roman acanthus. Here and there a block of grey stone with sculptured knots and interlacings excites a belief that at some period the whole façade may have been similarly decorated. This, however, is an open question. Some archæologists detect distinct traces of Lombard workmanship, and a curious carved inscription beside the great door is adduced in support of this theory, supposed to be the trade mark, as it were, of those wandering Lombard artificers who were likewise of the Confraternity of Free Masons.

Thus much of the Church of St. James and St. Christopher in the days when Sta. Maria of Loppia, down in the valley there, near the outlying stronghold of Loppia, was the head church of the diocese, with all the benefices and dignities thereunto appertaining.

But a great change came about in 1390. Some

years before that date, during a campaign in which the castle of Loppia was destroyed by the Lucchese, its church desecrated, its priest carried off in chains, and the whole district laid waste, a font had been erected in the Barga Church, and the rite of baptism performed there instead of at Loppia. But St. Christopher was poor; funds were lacking for pomp and ceremonies like those of Loppia; therefore in 1390 Giovanni, Bishop of Lucca, and Francesco di Barga, Archpriest of Sta. Maria di Loppia, duly signed a petition explaining the case, and praying that the Church of Barga might be endowed with the estates, emoluments, and appurtenances of the Pieve of Loppia; be raised to the rank of a *pieve* or parish church and baptistry, and be henceforth dedicated to the Holy Virgin as well as to St. Christopher Martyr (poor St. James was quite put aside); might be placed in the charge of the Chapter of the said church and hospital of Loppia, and remain in the gift and jurisdiction of the See of Lucca.

We can imagine that, all commiseration for Loppia's sufferings notwithstanding, it must have been a proud day for the brave and pious Barghigiani when their hill-top fane ceased to be one of the twelve churches subject to little Loppia down there in the valley. Doubtless they opened their purses willingly enough to pay for the enlargement and decorations befitting alike their church's new dignity, and the state of the many noble families who found it pleasanter to live behind strong walls than in the much harassed district on which those walls looked down. As we have seen, some archæologists consider that the travertine façade belonged to the original little church of St. Christopher, while others assert that it was only now, when the whole structure was enlarged, that it was faced with those yellowish slabs. Yet the sculptures on the corbelled and arcaded cornice of the façade argue in favour of the former hypothesis, for they are exceedingly primitive. On one corbel, for instance, we see a very pre-Raphaelite knight, probably St. George,

armed with sword and buckler, and about to give the death-stroke to the appalling dragon on the next corbel. Similarly placed is the archer, with a disproportionately large head, and the waggish-looking bird opposite awaiting the arrow shot. But on the left flank of the church are some small pointed arches, evidently of a later period.

The interior of the church is very imposing, and presents fine chiaro-oscuro effects as we come in from the blaze of sunshine without. On one side the light pours in through narrow pointed windows, on the other fights its way through curtains of dark crimson silk. And violet gleams and roseate glow are met and pierced by the long beams of pure sunlight from the open door. There has been some special ceremony on the previous day, and the floor is still strewn with twigs of box and yellow everlastings which send up whiffs of pungent fragrance as our feet pass over them. And there is the quaint old pulpit of which Barga is so justly proud ; and in our haste to approach it, we hardly notice that the

impressive range of pillars, coursed in black and white, are only painted to look like stone. This very interesting pulpit has many points of resemblance with that of San Miniato at Florence. It is of marble, and rests upon four shafts. One of these is supported by a grotesque crouching figure; the second and third, fronting the main entrance, respectively by a lion crushing a dragon, and a lion trampling on a human figure who has one hand in the brute's jowl and with the other has plunged a dagger up to the hilt in his throat; the fourth is longer, and has no pedestal. The capitals of these shafts are all very elegant, and each is of different design. On one we see a very realistic eagle scratching its beak with its left claw, with an air of deep reflection. The rim of the pulpit is inlaid with a running ornament in highly-polished black paste. Beneath is an arcade of small pointed arches much enriched. Their shafts have geometric patterns in the same black paste. The spaces between the arches have carvings of the Annunciation, Nativity,

and Adoration of the Magi in low relief. These are all very naïve and interesting, especially the three kings, who are briskly cantering towards the stable on exceedingly stumpy steeds. The figures, though coarse and clumsily executed, are full of life and movement. Their eyes are of black paste, round and projecting—like boot-buttons, as one of our party remarked. To the eye of the architect the interior of the church presents many interesting features; as, for instance, the great difference in width of the tall arches in the choir. Indeed there is no unity of design, and there would seem to have been a rapid change of ideas during the process of enlarging the church. The masonry being all of the same character denotes that there was no great difference in age. Some curious particulars respecting the church are to be found in the municipal records.

There is a provision, for instance, dated 1414, forbidding females to occupy places within the screen at the beginning of the transept while mass

was being performed, and ordaining that any one infringing this regulation should pay a fine of five soldi for every such offence. But the document naïvely adds, that of course this rule does not apply to the marriage service, during which it is lawful for the bride to remain within the railing with her husband. Exception, too, was made in favour of the female members of the Salvi and Manfredi families, and, it is stated, this privilege was granted in reward for important services rendered by those families in unravelling a plot against the liberties of Barga. This document opens with expressions of homage to God and all the saints of Paradise, laudatory mention of Pope John XXIII., and of the whole College of Cardinals. To the emperor no reference whatever is made. Praise is also rendered to the Priori delle Arti, the Gonfalonieri of justice, and to the magnificent and mighty people of the Commonwealth of Florence. There is a solemn declaration of faith in the Catholic Church, and in favour of the Guelph party. The honour,

state, and greatness of the territory and commune of Barga are likewise magnified. And at the conclusion is a prayer for the "*Mala morte* and final extermination of all the Ghibellines."

The gate or screen which no female might pass is, as we have stated, at the upper end of the nave ; it is raised on three steps, and abuts on the pulpit. It is of inlaid marble, and has some geometric and foliated designs of great beauty and variety. The font in the baptismal chapel, near the main entrance, is also worthy of remark. It is a huge marble basin of hexagonal form. In the large chapel to the right of the high altar is a graceful *edicola*—or receptacle for the holy oils—of Della Robbia ware, and attributed to Luca himself. But this, like the other *terre cotte* in Barga, is assigned by competent art critics to Andrea and his school, for, whereas no evidence exists of Luca ever having worked for Barga, Andrea is said to have resided there for some years. And, as we shall presently see, the pieces differ in several essential particulars from

Luca's known style of workmanship. This *edicola*, or ciborium, is shaped like a tiny altar let into the wall. Beneath an architrave is a lifted curtain, sustained by two angels. On the summit of the circular frontispiece is the sacramental cup, on which the infant Saviour stands in the act of benediction. On either side of the tabernacle is an angel clothed in a long tunic bearing a candelabrum, of which the base alone remains. These little figures are very suave and graceful. In a large niche in the choir stands a grotesque wooden image of Barga's patron saint, St. Christopher. This is of colossal size and ridiculously ill-proportioned form. The story goes that it had originally legs of a length suited to its body, but that being too tall for its destined receptacle, had to be cut down to fit in. It is of the rudest early Lombard workmanship, and its curiously florid colouring has been periodically renewed. There are several objects of interest in the sacristy. Among them a fine processional silver crucifix with four saints at the angles. It is

dated 1408, and is in some sense a reminiscence of the Orcagna style. There is also a very good chalice of the fourteenth century, richly chiselled and enamelled, and a store of splendid vestments of various periods.

And now the sacristan, telling us that we have seen all that the church contains, unlocks a little door at the extremity of the transept, and we find ourselves in a rude cloister opening on to an irregular bit of greensward: a sort of God's acre, though the corpses do not lie buried out there in the sun beneath the short, crisp turf, but are hidden away in some darksome pit under the stones of the cloister. It is only of late years that open cemeteries have been made, away from human dwellings. Before, in all these Italian towns, the dead were hurried out of sight into vaults beneath the parish church. From the low wall of this enclosure there is an enchanting view over sunny slopes, cloud-tipped peaks, and the red roofs of Barga bending towards the ravine-scored valley below.

Half an hour later we are down among Barga's narrow ways, in a little convent church of the Clarisse. For here is to be seen one of the chief artistic glories of the town: a magnificent Ascension of the Virgin, of Della Robbia work. It is locally attributed to Luca, but, like all these Barga pieces, art critics assign it to Andrea. For Luca, as we know, generally confined himself to pale blue and white, using other tints solely for those wondrous fruit garlands of which Venice still shows us the living counterparts, pendent from church doors during the great feast of the Redentore. Yet, save in the matter of colour, this Ascension is almost worthy of the founder of the school. The rapt expression of the St. Francis is wonderfully given. Indeed the group of saints surrounding the empty sepulchre is far finer than that of the Virgin and angels above. Exquisite lilies are sprouting from the tomb, and within the frame of flowers and fruit is a ring of seraphim, with much variety of expression in their rounded baby features. At the

base is a narrow dado of numerous tiny half-length figures of saints, of very delicate workmanship. Unfortunately these are almost hidden by the usual decorations, but it is some slight comfort to note that the nuns are free from one, at least, of the besetting sins of tawdriness. Real flowers bloom in the altar vases instead of the ordinary caricatures in coloured paper. Over the great door is another terra cotta: a graceful Virgin and Child enwreathed in a circle of fruit.

Before plodding our way back the length of the town to examine the Della Robbias in St. Francesco, we went on to the church of the Fornacetta, said to occupy the site of the Della Robbias' furnace. To reach it we had to pass, what may literally be called Barga's back gate, leading to the mountain mule paths and the picturesque *Giardino* suburb. And issuing from this gate we find ourselves at the edge of a precipice. Barga's walls tower high behind us, and we look down into a deep ravine, once a most effectual moat, but now spanned by a narrow cause-

way. To the right a shrunken stream gleams here and there among the stones at the bottom ; and figs, and vines, and creeping plants of many shades drape the steep rocks beneath the walls, and fall into a tangle of greenery and flowers below. High in air and ivy-hung, a fine aqueduct strides boldly over the gorge, and we look across to the woods and gardens of the huge Angeli Villa. Beyond the causeway we pass between neat little houses to the Fornacetta church, which is still hung about with the withered festoons of some recent holy festival. There is nothing to be seen within ; all is common and tawdry ; the pictures execrable. But that fine view of Barga's strongest side would have well repaid us for a more toilsome climb.

Returning to the town, one threads a network of narrow streets, with narrower cross alleys, like steep cascades of dingy stones, dropping down into them at intervals ; of darksome corners and darker archways that might be dens of assassins, but are only nests of dirt. Then on through a queer triangular

piazza, with a few fine old mansions of massive stone, and past the Municipio (to which we shall presently return), and out at the chief gate by the Pallone ground—where the game goes briskly now—on our way to San Francesco; for this suburban building is rich in Della Robbias. It is the church of the now suppressed Capuchin monastery, founded about the middle of the fifteenth century by Frà Beato Ercolano di Barga, a preaching friar, whose fervid eloquence roused the enthusiasm and opened the purses of his numerous hearers. It is situated about a quarter of a mile from the gate, down a steep lane, among fields and vineyards, and mossy walls. The narrow, ill-lighted church contains three large altar-pieces, all probably by Andrea, though the Barghigiani energetically attribute one of them to Luca della Robbia; and whoever its author, this Nativity is a very noble composition. St. Jerome and St. Francis are kneeling before the Babe; the loveliest angels are hovering in the air, and one of them has a

scroll inscribed with musical notes. The Virgin and Child are tenderly beautiful. Heads of animals in lowest relief come in effectively behind the central group. On the dado is a small Pietà, a St. John, and four other saints. The whole is surrounded by a finely-moulded wreath of smiling cherubim.

The piece over the altar opposite is equal in size, but very inferior in merit. Its subject is St. Francis receiving the stigmata. The saint's figure is good, his rapt fervour subtly expressed ; but the cold, pasty colouring of the whole work, its clumsiness of design and execution, alike suggest its being one of Andrea's earliest works or that of some pupil of the school. It has a coarse background of realistic cottages on the top of the hill, recalling the early German style. The blue, which is the prevailing colour, is cold and heavy, totally unlike the tint used by Luca. In the centre of the dado is a circular medallion of the Virgin and Child, with two angels in adoration, and four praying figures. The

whole is bordered by angel heads, with stiff pendants of flowers and fruit.

In the choir stands the third altar-piece, an Assumption. The Virgin is floating up to heaven amid a cluster of attendant angels. She has dropped her girdle into the outstretched hands of St. John, who kneels to receive the gift. On the dado is a little door, that of the Virgin's tomb, surrounded by cherubs and lightly-floating angels. This beautiful work has the usual frame of flowers and fruit, and is undoubtedly by Andrea della Robbia. So, probably, are the well-executed figures, four feet in height, of St. Anthony and St. Andrew at the entrance of the presbytery. Formerly the Mordini chapel, in the same building, contained two other figures—an angel of the Annunciation and the Virgin Mary—but these have been removed to the family palace, where we were presently shown them by Signor Mordini, ex-Prefect of Naples.

In the cloister is a clumsy, unvarnished terra cotta, alleged to be an unfinished group by Andrea,

and quoted by the natives as a triumphant proof that all these works were produced in Barga itself. Before leaving the subject of the Della Robbias, we may observe that among the records of Barga is a memorandum that, in the year following the restoration and enlargement of S. Cristofano, the Della Robbias were removed to that church from San Francesco, but there is no record of the date when they were replaced in the monastery. In fact there is a singular dearth of documents on all matters relating to works of art in the Duomo; and the present syndic, who is occupied with researches in the past history of Barga, has failed to discover any particulars concerning these magnificent terra cottas. The large collection of municipal archives is as yet uncatalogued, and the older files and volumes have suffered considerably from damp. Among the latter are some contracts of the twelfth century. It also contains copies of many interesting historical documents—negotiations with Florence, &c.—dated as early as the thirteenth century, and of which the

originals may be found in the archives of Lucca and Florence.

Barga went through so many and various vicissitudes, that its history reads like a novel—a novel without a hero, however ; for, though renowned *en masse* for their fighting power and energy, the stalwart Barghigiani boast but few townsmen whose names were known to history. And of those few only the scantiest details are forthcoming, for their share of the world's work was done down in the plains, far from the high walls of their native stronghold.

Simone di Barga, for instance, made his reputation in Lucca about the middle of the fourteenth century. He was a celebrated doctor of the law, filled several important diplomatic posts, and compiled the Statutes of 1372. Then, in 1527, we hear of a certain valiant captain, Galeotto da Barga, who was commandant of the fortress of Leghorn for the Republic of Florence, and held out for a considerable time against the Medici troops. In the days of the Renaissance, Barga contributed to the

ranks of the learned men in the person of Pietro Angelio, surnamed the Bargeo. He was a Latinist of some repute, owned the finest palace in Barga, and founded the still existing family of the Marquises Angeli of Pisa. A tablet commemorating this worthy's acquirements is to be seen on the wall of the municipal palace. Among lesser notabilities, we may mention that a native of Barga was the introducer of the silk trade into Bologna in 1341. This he must himself have learnt at Lucca, which was the first town in Italy where the art of silk spinning was carried on.

No one can visit Barga without desiring to know something of its past days. Its remarkable strategical position, the strength of its walls, its picturesque lanes, its fine population, its general air of present well-being, the testimony to past prosperity afforded by the massiveness of its principal mansions, and its love of the fine arts, all combine to arouse the strongest wish to learn details of the events of which it was the scene.

Up to the present time no complete history of Barga has been written, though one has been contemplated by the learned Dr. Carina, whose memoranda we have been privileged to read. The many political storms that have swept over the *castello* may probably be held accountable for the many gaps in the town records; and it is necessary to ransack the archives of Lucca and Florence to obtain anything like a general view of Barga's past.

All the world knows that at the beginning of the eleventh century almost the whole of Italy was subject to the German emperors, who ruled the different provinces by means of dukes, marquises, and counts, enjoying almost feudal supremacy over the chief cities and a greater or smaller extent of circumjacent territory. As to the rural districts, they were distributed among lesser nobles, known as *valvassori*, *cattani*, &c. It is equally well known that Tuscany, in virtue of its extent and position, ranked among the more important imperial provinces, styled marches and duchies, and that its

lords, sometimes dukes, sometimes marquises, ruled over the principal cities, but had their chief residence in Lucca, the capital of the entire province.¹

Even in those misty times, as may be gleaned from the scanty notices scattered over the pages of old chroniclers, the men of Barga were distinguished for their valour, and in the following century obtained a special diploma, or patent, from Frederic Barbarossa, guaranteeing them his imperial protection, and declaring their absolute independence of every other authority. This document, after lauding the constant fidelity of the inhabitants, proceeds to assure them that the imperial nuncios in Garfagnana will guarantee to them the maintenance of all rights and privileges enjoyed by their forefathers from the days of the Countess Matilda. Later, the Statutes of Garfagnana in 1287, and those of

¹ In a treaty of peace, concluded at Lucca, between Bishop Andrea of Luni and the Marquises Malaspina, in the year 1124, mention is made of that city in the following terms : "Gloriosa civitas Lucca, multis dignitatibus decorata, atque super universam Tuscie Marchiam caput ab exordio constituta," &c. (Muratori).

Lucca, 1308, promulgated after that Republic had assumed supremacy over the whole *contado*, secured many special favours to Barga.

And throughout the turmoil of the Middle Ages, we find this little *castello* (as the smaller walled towns were called) preserving a certain measure of independence, and though frequently brought into subjection to the despots of Lucca, as frequently shaking off the yoke, and, after various vicissitudes, finally swearing allegiance to the Commonwealth of Florence. To her, indeed, it was rather an ally than a subordinate, and retained numerous rights that were seldom allowed by the jealousy of the Florentines.

But in all transactions with Barga account had to be taken of the tenacity with which the Barghigiani clung to their old right of self-government. Barbarossa's famous diploma was addressed to the consuls and people of Barga; which proves that, from the days of the Countess Matilda, a consular magistracy of popular origin already existed there, alike independent of the powerful Garfagnana

baronage and of the Commune of Lucca. There was also another reason why Florence sheathed her claws in velvet in dealing with these sturdy mountaineers. In all previous conflicts and dissensions between Lucca and Pisa, Barga had invariably sided with the latter city, for whenever the former was free of war alarms from Pisa, it always made fresh attempts to extend its territory in the direction of the Garfagnana. It was therefore of the highest importance to Florence to know that no aid should come to Pisa from that nest of fighting men up the valley of the Serchio.

The Barghigiani never seem to have been an aggressive people, and reserved their valour for the defence of their rights and the maintenance of their boundaries. Their bitter hatred of the Lucchese, their often-recurring struggles against them, were always on this question of frontier. When Lucca wanted an excuse to attack Barga, it was her custom to stir up neighbouring districts to boundary quarrels with the place. It was on one such

occasion that, as far back as 1298, the Potestà of Lucca, one Gonzelino, marched on Barga with 2,700 men, besieged it, carried it by storm, and demolished both its walls and its citadel.

But the town seems to have recovered its pristine strength with considerable rapidity, since—as we have seen in writing of the cathedral—in less than half a century Barga had become a place of refuge for the whole country round; its church became virtually the *chiesa maggiore* in consequence of the desecration of the Loppia fane and destruction of the village and outlying fortresses by the unrelenting Lucchese.

In fact, from the middle of the thirteenth to the second half of the fourteenth century, Barga was almost continually engaged in efforts to shake off the yoke of Lucca. The longest interval of tranquillity was during the latter years of Castruccio's reign, when that sagacious tyrant saw fit to pursue a policy of reconciliation. His death, in 1328, was the signal for a fresh revolt of the Barghigiani, who

opened secret negotiations with Florence. But the plot was betrayed, and Lucca instantly sent a considerable force to reduce the town to obedience. Florence, on her side, hastily despatched Amerigo Donati at the head of 400 men, but the succour was ineffectual; other Florentine expeditions also failed, and the men of Barga had to rely on themselves alone. For a time they were subdued, but in 1331, by means of one of the Rolandinghi (the dominant family in the district) and another noble, they again threw off their allegiance to Lucca. Coppo di Medici came from Florence to take possession of the town, and on his departure left a small force behind to prevent it from being carried as before by some sudden *coup de main* of the Lucchese. But Lucca was on the alert to regain the coveted territory, and the following year besieged the town in junction with the troops of King John of Bohemia. The Florentines, although aided by Spinetto Malaspina, failed to relieve the place; Barga was again compelled to come to terms and open her gates to

the attacking army. The chroniclers are silent as to the duration of this siege, but there is reason to suppose that it lasted about six weeks. The citizens' lives were spared, but the four principal personages in the town were made to take the oath of obedience barefoot and with every display of abject repentance. Then followed nine years of silent discontent on the part of Barga, of noisy oppression on that of Lucca ; but at the end of that period the then Lords of Lucca, the Scaligeri, ceded that city and its whole territory, inclusive of Barga, to the Florentines for the sum of 250,000 florins. Florence proved unable to hold Lucca, and presently yielded it to the besieging Pisans ; but when peace was concluded, October 9, 1342, Barga remained in the possession of Florence.

Now for ten years the little town flourished in the enjoyment of the privileges granted her by Florence, while her old oppressor, Lucca, was groaning in servitude to Pisa. But in 1352, Francesco Castracane, who had already taken possession

of the neighbouring town of Coreglia, gathered together a large band of armed men, marched on Barga, and kept up the siege for four months, until driven away by a formidable troop of mercenaries in the pay of Florence. This danger averted, Barga hoped to return to her former tranquillity, especially as, hitherto, Pisa had shown no disposition to molest her, notwithstanding the renewal of the war with Florence.

Unfortunately the Pisans were aware how easy it would be to strike a blow at their enemy through Barga, and accordingly one night they suddenly appeared before the gate with a force of 4,000 foot and 1,000 horse. Their first assault was unsuccessful, for the women of Barga flocked to the walls and gallantly aided the male folk in repelling the enemy. Upon this the Pisans formally invested the town. Piero Fornesi, general of the Florentine army, hastened to its relief, and though his first onslaught was repulsed, he finally succeeded in raising the siege, and taking many Pisans prisoners.

The year was not at an end before Pisa again attacked Barga, whose designation might well be that of "Barga the besieged." This time the attempt was made with the aid of a contingent of English mercenaries. The town was just then garrisoned by a body of 150 men, under the command of Benghi di Teghia Buondelmonti. The citizens fought with their accustomed valour, and made a successful sally, in which they utterly routed the enemy, and seized all the baggage and munitions of war. Many prisoners were taken, and some 150 Pisans and English left dead upon the field. In reward for this dashing victory, Florence confirmed Benghi in his post of Captain of Barga for another eighteen months—a most unusual term of authority for a Florentine official.

Now came a long period of repose, in which Barga had apparently no history; had leisure to listen to Frà Ercolano's burning exhortations, to watch the building of his convent church and discuss the merits of the terra cotta pictures destined for its shrines.

With the opening of the fifteenth century, however, the old troubles returned. In 1401 party strife ran high in Garfagnana between Guelph and Ghibelline ; some members of the latter faction hatched a conspiracy to wrest Barga from the Florentines and throw it into the hands of their own party. But the plot was discovered—probably by means of the Manfredi and Salvi, whose ladies, as we have seen, were privileged to sit within the chancel of the Duomo—and the Captain-General did speedy justice on the conspirators.

Not yet had Barga seen the last of besieging armies, for in 1437 the renowned Condottiere Piccinino marched on the town with a formidable force. He expected to obtain an easy victory, but the inhabitants received speedy succour from Florence. A pitched battle took place beneath the walls on the 8th of February, 1437, and not only was the great leader compelled to raise the siege, but his army was ignominiously routed and put to flight with heavy losses of men and material.

Again, a century later, in 1554, Barga was in great peril from open attack and underhand intrigue. Piero Strozzi marched from Siena to the Serchio valley in order to effect a junction with the French troops, under the Seigneur of Forquevaux, who were coming from Lombardy to his assistance. He halted at Ponte a Moriano, and decided to attempt the seizure of Barga in concert with the French, who were already near at hand.

We learn from the historian Ammirato, that the Florentines and their Duke Cosimo had entire confidence in the men of Barga, knowing them to be "*accustomed to warfare and exceedingly courageous and trustworthy. But that this was not enough, seeing that the walls were old and weak, and that likewise there were certain fuorisciti who would have dearly liked to see their native place won over to the French side.*" Wherefore the Ducal Commissioner, Vincenzo Ridolfi, demanded aid of Fivizzano (another strong place in Garfagnana, some miles beyond Barga), and at no small risk and peril it sent the

desired help. De Forquevaultx did his best to seduce the Barghigiani by depicting in glowing colours the splendid privileges and advantages that would accrue to them on their joining the French cause. But the valiant mountaineers were incorruptible. They replied that they enjoyed great liberty under the gentle sway of Florence; they jeered at the proffered favours, and stated their resolve to defend their walls to the last extremity. Upon this the French general, having no leisure for a hazardous siege, thought it wiser to abandon the enterprise, and went on his way to join Strozzi's army. Afterwards, when the Medici dynasty was firmly established, the Barghigiani were relieved of all fear of losing their liberty. Their energy was turned into peaceful channels; trade and industry flourished; their population overflowed the walls and spread over the hill-sides. Now and again quarrels would burst out with their old foes of Lucca concerning some question of frontier or rights of pasturage; but these were passing shadows in no way affecting the prosperity of the little town.

Indeed, owing to its immunity from octroi duty and from various taxes levied on its less fortunate neighbours, up to the year 1859, when, with the rest of Tuscany, it became part of the Italian kingdom, Barga drove a thriving trade in smuggling, and not a few of its inhabitants bitterly regret what, to them, were the good old times. But even in these days of excessive taxation, Barga is still in better case than the majority of communities off the beaten track. Several silk mills and silk and felt manufactories prosper there. Numerous flocks and herds are reared on its rich pastures, and wool and cheese are among its prominent sources of revenue. The Barga hemp, grown in the lowlands by the Serchio, is famed for its excellence, while the vineyards to the south of the town produce a sound wine of more than average quality.

As for the air, it is so pure and elastic that did the town offer the commonest inducements to travellers in the shape of habitable inns, decent food, and means of conveyance, it might prove a formidable

rival to the hackneyed Baths of Lucca. For the narrow valley of the Lima, with its oppressive, relaxing climate, generally either too hot or too damp in the summer months, during which it is most frequented, owes the majority of its visitors to the fact of being the only country retreat within easy reach of Florence, where creature comforts and good hotels may be found. Barga is invariably several degrees cooler than the Bagni, and is free from the heavy dews that make the latter so trying to many constitutions. Where, too, in the valley are there extended mountain views like those commanded from every side of Barga? And scattered over the surrounding hills are hamlets, convents, and ruins. All of artistic and historic interest, and all still unbroken ground to the tourist world.

III.

THE ABETONE



The Abetone.



SITUATED in the heart of the Tuscan Apennines, about twenty miles from the Pracchia station, forty from Florence, and at 4,600 feet above the sea, the Abetone, or Bosco Lungo, is the coolest of Italian summer resorts. Its woods seem the threshold of a great Alpine forest, but practically are a mere oasis of firs and beeches in the hollows and on the flank of a sun-baked mountain range. From their every edge and opening the outlook is always to grey or sun-coloured peaks with streaks of scarped

the July sun is high, and every now and then the serried trunks open out into delightful glades, recalling Keats'—

“Mid forest brake,
Rich with a sprinkling of fair musk rose-blooms.”

In these laburnum droops its golden clusters, and there are tangles of sweetbriar, smooth-leaved rose-bushes with small crimson flowers, trails of raspberries and brambles. Here and there too in darker dingles, and wherever there are boggy spots among the bilberry banks, and a little water still in the torrent-beds, grow patches of forget-me-nots, and tall spikes of aconite and other wicked-looking, poisonous things. Colts' foot and mares' tails too abound, but these degenerate descendants of primeval vegetation seem out of place everywhere now-a-days, excepting in savage ravines cleft by glacier streams. Then there is a delightful bullock track winding through the recesses of the forest to the lower crags of the Libro Aperto—the double peak on which winter snows rest in the semblance

of the pages of a half-opened book. From this track one can branch off into hidden glades where the secret of the woods is revealed to the solitary wanderer. "The incommunicable trees begin to persuade us to live with them, and quit our life of solemn trifles."

Looking out from the dense shade of the firs, the strong summer sunlight transforms the bushes on the crest of steep banks into screens of gleaming emeralds. On all sides is a fascinating dance of light and shade ; now of pure white sunshine, and then, towards evening, showers of gold fall on the lichened trunks. The air is full of bird-voices, and their songs are accompanied by the hum and buzz of innumerable, unseen insects. But there come moments of utter stillness, when all nature seems hushed to sleep. Then suddenly the spell is broken ; birds and insects awake ; there are mysterious cracklings and rustlings all about you ; the woodpeckers tap more noisily than before ; a brown or black squirrel darts up a tree close beside you.

and frisks from branch to branch ; a family of tomtits flutters down in short, playful flights, and you fancy the mother bird is peeping from the nest overhead to superintend the children's sports. Suddenly, at touch of wind or wing, a shower of fir needles rains down, and the timid tomtits disappear. But with human companions you miss all these domestic scenes of forest life. Then you only hear distant birds, and on hot days the incessant sawing of *cicale*. Cicale at 4,600 feet above the sea !

You hoped to have left their "*noioso metro*" behind in the plains. Carducci is the only Italian poet who has a good word for these noisy rejoicers in mid-summer heat. He says they are "*pazze di sole*," and their chorus a hymn of joy, in which the eternal youth of mother earth celebrates her nuptials with the sun. And he quotes the pretty Greek fancy that men who had given their lives to the Muses were turned into brown *cicale* after death.

Sometimes through crossing branches you have a glimpse of the fawn-coloured crest of the Libro

Aperto, or the hump of its comrade, the Cimone. Or, again, you are unexpectedly at the edge of the woods, and look out on sun-bathed meadows and their carnival rout of flowers and grasses. Ox-eyed daisies, rue, columbine, asphodel, thyme, orchises, scented and unscented, St. John's wort, several varieties of veronica, pinks—dark-crimson and palest rose—dwarf, bright blue gentian and purplish field gentian, bugloss and scabious, harebells and phittyuma, and a groundwork of yellow blossoms, lady's rattle, lotus, potentilla, ranunculus. And these are only a few items of the mountain flora.

Then there is more than one uncanny dell low down in the valley, where great moss-grown boulders lie cushioned on bilberries. Rocks that are often so grotesque in form, that you scan the spreading fir branches overhead, as if in search of the famous old witch who was in the habit of turning princes and their faithful animals into stone.

But the sweetest spot in the whole forest is a tiny glade on the flank of the Libro Aperto. It is a

round space of turf among the pines, crossed by a crystal-clear rivulet. On its shallow bank, and in the shade of a yew tree, stands a huge fir stump, crowned by a spreading fern. Surely some maiden of Queen Titania's court must have dropped the fern-seed into that hollow trunk! Nature is seldom so purposely decorative. And indeed this dainty glade seems marked out for fairy trysts or revels.

The Abetone is really grand on moonlit nights. Even the mean little church gains dignity as it stands out clear and white against the firs at the turn of the road, and the pastures hedged in by the solemn forest are a rare and lovely sight. The silver firs wear a very spectral aspect; you may trace ghastly figures with outstretched arms in every moon-struck stem. The tall larches are feathered with silver, and once, when there was a misty moon, we saw a fir-top cut through its disk in such wise that the tree seemed to have a halo of dusky smoke rags, while its extreme tip was surrounded by soft, white light.

One still July night, coming down the road from

the Pension Major, when no faintest breath of wind was stirring, we were startled by a novel sound. It was the voice of the forest—its night voice—a solemn, continuous murmur. For a moment we stood spellbound, then tried to understand what it might be. Not the hum of bees, for they sleep by night; it was too indistinct to be a chorus of frogs, neither could it be a murmur of the distant Lima, which was too dwindled to have a voice that could reach so far. We were content to leave it unexplained. It was a wonderful and mysterious sound, sinking and swelling with a slight metallic ring. The fascination of it grew fairly uncanny. It might have heralded the march of some spectral host through the moonlit glades below.

Nor were human interests lacking at the Abetone. The villagers are simple, kindly people, always ready to chat with the strangers, and the women are picturesque on festive days, with bright yellow silk kerchiefs on their handsome heads. One day the Improvisatrice Beatrice came to the hotel to sit

for her portrait to one of the visitors. This wonderful old woman is famed throughout Tuscany for her gift of improvising verses in different metres on all sorts of subjects. She is an untaught, hard-working peasant of the Sestaione valley, and must have been strikingly beautiful in her youth. She was seventy when we saw her, but still handsome and lively, and her withered face lost its age when she began to sing and recite. Her tall, robust figure was little bent by the weight of years. She had walked all the way from her home—five miles of steady ascent—and was going to walk back in the evening. Her pretty old eyes, mild and sunken in repose, flashed and sparkled when she spoke. Her skin was a network of minute wrinkles, her shapely head was bound by a kerchief folded like those of Michelangelo's Fates. She had a resolute, well-cut nose, and her toothless mouth had harmonious curves. She gave us several improvisations of facile verse, mainly composed of popular sayings and axioms strung together haphazard. Some she sang

in a curious minor chaunt, some she recited. Her voice "no longer served" her, she said, with a gentle sigh. But though quavering, it was still tuneful. Her manners were delightful. She had the pretty confidence of a petted child, and told us how some of her verses had been printed, and how many great people had been to see her. She added that only the winter before she had received no less than eight invitations to Florence, but had refused them all on account of the illness and death of a dear little grandchild. In fact, Professor Tigri, the great authority on Tuscan popular songs, knows La Beatrice well, and gives an interesting account of her in one of his works. Professor Giuliani has also written of her, and noted the Dantesque phraseology in use among the mountaineers of the Pistoian Apennines, especially in the district where Beatrice lives. And although unlettered, this gifted woman has picked up some literary knowledge, for, in beginning one of her recitations, she said: "Now I will give you some Bernesque verses." I inquired if

none of her six children had inherited her powers, and she replied that her youngest boy sang well, and had "a good brain." Her heart is as good as her wit, and she has never had her head turned by the notice and flattery lavished upon her. She has been an exemplary wife and mother ; and although her fame has had no golden fruits beyond passing gifts, she proves her heaven-born nobility by generous helpfulness to her poorer neighbours. Long may she live with her children and grandchildren among the chestnut woods of the Sestaione !

Another day we had the spectacle of an *al fresco* court of justice at Dr. Major's Pension. This pension, once a frontier custom-house, of the Duchy of Modena, is a quarter of a mile beyond the Abetone hotel, just where the road begins to dip down into the vale of Fiumalbo. It has a fine position, commanding the verdant basin of fields and pastures encircled by clustered mountains capped by considerable peaks. The wide, sunny landscape is a

delightful surprise as you issue from the shadowy woods, and every passing cloud changes the ethereal vesture of hill and dale.

The firs and beeches sweep up the mountain behind the house, but cease abruptly at the edge of the valley by the sandhills, marking the confines of the former Tuscan dominions. When Dr. Major bought the old custom-house, he also bargained for an additional scrap of ground at the foot of the sandhills, adjoining the cottage of a blind peasant named Fortunato. But the latter disputed the Government's right to sell the bit of land, and alleged that it was his own freehold property. The authorities asked to see his title-deeds. He had lost them, so the poor old man was in danger of losing his home as well as his plot of ground. But shortly before the first hearing of the case, Fortunato discovered a fragment of the missing deed, showing the date, 1802, but with the names of notary and witnesses torn off. Happily his lawyer recognized the handwriting as that of the deceased notary of a

neighbouring town. Search was made in the office of the said notary's successor, and an attested copy of the lost deed found. But this only confirmed Fortunato's title to the cottage, there being no mention of the scrap of ground. His right to this now hung on the length of time it had been in his father's possession. Eighty years' tenure is required to confirm ownership ; so Fortunato, aided by a benevolent American lady interested in his case, had hunted up all the oldest inhabitants of the neighbourhood to depose in his favour.

The tribunal sat in the road outside Dr. Major's dining-room windows, and opposite the contested bit of soil. Judge and notary were established at a toilet table, with an oil-cloth cover ; lawyers and witnesses occupied cross benches. Some tottering old men gave a good deal of inconclusive evidence. One of them remembered that Fortunato's father owned the bit of land sixty years back, but could not swear that it was enclosed as at present. He thought he had seen it sometimes with and some-

times without a fence. The Crown lawyer wished to know if there were trees on the land. Fortunato's counsel wasn't sure, had never noticed, ran across the road to look and came back triumphantly reporting that there was *one* cherry tree.

The proceedings were diversified by much smoking and spitting, and enlivened by the howls of several small children hovering on the outskirts of this primitive court. And no verdict was arrived at, for the Crown lawyer having unluckily raised a question which the present judge was not competent to decide, the case was adjourned until the following month in the Court of Pieve di Pelago.

There the matter was amicably arranged, and the blind man left in possession of his one cherry tree and patch of vegetables.

For pedestrians of limited powers, Monte Maggiore, the foot-hill of the Cimone and Libro Aperto range, is one of the finest points of view. It is a bold bluff overhanging the vale of Fiumalbo. You approach it from the sandhills, through a copse of

starveling beeches — workhouse children of the neighbouring forest. Then crossing an open space of sand and rocks, a square green height lies straight ahead, crested to the right by a grove of mighty beech trees backed by pale, grey peaks.

The view was specially grand one afternoon when a storm was brewing away to the south. To the left rose chain beyond chain of blue hill-tops, and dark, wooded slopes, bold green ridges, clustered grey summits, and the wild peaks of S. Pellegrino overhung by inky cloud masses. And down below, in the funnel-shaped gorge, lay the little grey town of Fiumalbo, wedged in at the foot of greyer Cimone. By the time we reached the beech grove on the topmost plateau, after a stiff climb over steep, slippery turf, the storm rack was drifting towards us. We were still in the sunshine, with blue sky overhead, but ominous vapours were floating over Cimone's crest and the twin peaks of the Libro Aperto were dark and grim against leaden clouds. From the edge of our bluff we looked down on the roofs of

Fiumalbo, and saw the plunge of the waterfall into the milky torrent that gives its name to the town. We walked along to the narrow ridge connecting Monte Maggiore with the Libro Aperto, and turning aside into the forest, soon struck the fairy dell at the end of the bullock track.

But the most romantic scenery within easy reach of the Abetone is decidedly the Valley of Springs, at the foot of the Tre Potenze. The shortest route to it is by the mule track through the woods and over the ridge behind the Pension, but it is perhaps more impressive when approached by the old road to the Baths of Lucca. Turning off through some fields from the Fiumalbo road, you presently strike this abandoned highway. It was made in the days when Tuscany and Modena were upon bad terms—and Lucca, a separate state—to enable the Duchess of Modena to reach her favourite baths without passing through the territory of her unfriendly neighbour. It is no longer practicable for carriages, and at some points barely so for pedestrians. But it affords views

of varied loveliness as it winds up the cliffs at the base of the high wooded range closing in the fertile valley. You pass through a chaos of sunburnt rocks ; all is intensely southern. Then suddenly you come to a grove of larches and emerge from it into a cool and shady Alpine retreat, with rushing waters all about you. A grand torrent tears its way through a rocky ravine ; you tread on soft turf seamed by innumerable streamlets, and 'broidered with white Parnassus and blue forget-me-nots. The glen grows wilder at every step. Fine limestone bluffs and bristling crags rise above the woods. Mossy boulders lie scattered among the bilberry beds. You may forget you are in Italy, unless you glance back through the blue gate of the hills to the little southern town nestled beneath the crags of Cimone. A train of charcoal-laden mules, with grim and grimy drivers, comes jingling down a side path among the trees. From the bridge over the torrent by which the road turns off to the Foce di Giove you see the summit of the Tre Potenze at the head

of the glen. The Springs, or Pozzi, are some distance further on, at the foot of that fine mountain, where the vale ends in a broad *cul de sac*. A multitude of rivulets course through the grass, and two big torrents wind over stony beds, forming shallow ravines here and there among fallen boulders. There are running waters on all sides; the fir wood has come to end; there are only clumps of beeches on islands of turf. Sheep-bells tinkle pleasantly on the steep slopes, below the upheaved limestone strata walling in this wild and solitary spot.

It was impossible to leave the Abetone without visiting Fiumalbo. Seen from the heights it was always the key-note of a symphony in grey. For it has grey roofs and lies in the grey gully, at the foot of grey Cimone, the highest mountain of the Abetone group. You wind down to it by five miles of leafy road, skirting the Costa del Medino. From the high bridge—grey, of course—over the grey-stoned river bed, there are fine views of the Valley of Springs and other tempting glens. Lower

down, by the town, a ruined castle crowns a projecting crag and commands the defile towards Pieve di Pelago. At close quarters Fiumalbo is seen to be enlivened by many warmer tints. Its inhabitants are great lovers of flowers, and nearly every house has a *loggia* filled with blossoming plants, and garden scenes painted on the walls. The principal church has some ancient pillars with fine capitals cruelly defaced and blunted by whitewash, and on the columns of the peristyle two curious early bas-reliefs, with the emblems of the Knights Templars. The Sacristan proudly displayed his collection of banners and vestments, and seemed astonished at our preferring rich old brocades and faded embroideries to modern silks of brilliant aniline dyes.

Tiny, tortuous streets lead to the Piazza of Fiumalbo and its one great house with a wide terrace and double flight of steps. Near it is the shop of the druggist and herbalist, who is the leading personage of the little town. Signor Coppi is the local antiquarian, is a man of substance, and

devotes his leisure to the fabrication of plaster casts. Our concern with him was to obtain leave to visit the ruined castle on the crag of which he is the owner. Being disengaged, he obligingly accompanied us, and led the way, by a steep lane of hovels swarming with dirty children, to steeper steps cut in the rock.

It was a happy thought to convert the castle courtyard into a radiant flower-garden; but how could a man with a taste for art and archæology build that hideous, bright pink house at the edge of the enclosure! This eyesore is to be let to *forestieri*, and our admiration was claimed for its interior arrangements. The watch-tower at the other end overhanging the river is still habitable, and its crumbled battlements are replaced by a tiled roof. The ground floor is devoted to plaster casts. The first story is a pleasant little study lined with books and dried plants, and the second shelters some indifferent *bric-à-brac*, minerals, shells, and odds and ends of broken pottery. From the top we enjoyed

novel views of the familiar mountains and turns of the valley. We looked straight up to the grey precipices of Mon Cimone, and the blank bareness of its grim, pale face seemed less desolate on this side, whence it is seen to be belted with pleasant woodlands, and gladdened by the flash of leaping cascades.



IV.

THE PALIO OF SIENA



The Palio of Siena.



VEN in pleasure-loving Italy characteristic local festivals are rapidly dying out. But among the few still lingering on with more or less vitality, the *Palio* of Siena is undoubtedly the brightest, most spirited, and that which best retains the stamp of antiquity.


Every year, towards the middle of August, Siena shakes off her summer drowsiness, and awakes to a burst of cheerfulness and festivity. The leading families hurry back from mountain villas and seaside resorts to their grand old dusky palaces in town ;

the narrow shop-windows are decked with tempting wares ; country folk pour in from hill and valley ; the doors of the theatre re-open ; brass bands practise new pieces night and day ; and the inhabitants of the seventeen *Contrade*, into which Siena is divided, eagerly discuss the chances and merits of rival horses and jockeys.

For the famous festival of the *Palio* is neither more nor less than a horse race, run in that storied Piazza del Campo, than which it were hard, anywhere in the world, to find a spot less adapted for the purpose. For, as every one knows, this Piazza is in the cavity of the extinct crater upon which Siena is built. It is shell-shaped, and its slopes are paved with small, irregular stones. An English jockey, or indeed a horseman of any kind, would be aghast at the notion of riding any animal round such a course, over a scanty layer of sand ; yet it is here that in pursuance of time-honoured custom the Siena races are run.

For many centuries all public games have been

held in this Piazza. First the Elmore Games—sham fights like those of the Greeks and Romans; then the Georgian Games, dedicated to St. George, and in commemoration of the bloody victory of Monte Aperti. Later came the game of Pallone, when, in the presence of the captain of the people and the chief magistrates, the youth of Siena fought for the possession of a great ball hurled down among them from the summit of the Mangia tower. This was succeeded by Wrestling Matches, taking place in the winter season, and continued from the year 1291 down to the beginning of the present century. But the longest enduring public festivities are those contests between the *Contrade* of Siena, which have survived to our own day in the form of the *Palio* races. The *Contrade* are district associations of the seventeen sections of the city, each with its own laws and officials, its own treasury, and its own church. Seldom at peace, yet seldom at downright feud with one another, their rivalry never leads to very serious results. Their origin is lost in that



of the Republic, and it is impossible to fix the precise date of their foundation. We know, however, that as far back as 1160 the city was divided into *Terzi*, or thirds; and that in 1328 there were fifty-nine *Contrade*, namely, twenty in the *Terzo di Città*, twenty in that of *St. Martino*, and nineteen in that of *Camollia*. Each *Contrada* had its captain, standard-bearer, and council of three, and all were subject to the authority of the captain of the people. In times of war the members of the *Contrade* took arms, and marched under their respective flags to the defence of the Republic. Every *Contrada* had some animal for its emblem, and was usually designated by its name, though sometimes by that of its street or patron saint. This custom still prevails. The number of the *Contrade* rose and fell with the rise and fall of the population and the vicissitudes of the State. When the Republic fell under the yoke of the Medici, it was already reduced to twenty-three; and when, at a tournament in the Piazza in 1675, the *Contrade* of the Strong Sword, Viper,

Bear, Lion, Cock, and Oak joined in insulting the judges, they were suppressed, and their districts divided among the seventeen others, which are still in existence. These are the Tortoise, Forest, Snail, Panther, Eagle, Wave, Sheep, Tower, Shell, Owl, Unicorn, Goose, Worm, Giraffe, Wolf, and Hedgehog.

But the present *Palio* races are very mild survivals of the bloody contests in which the *Contrade* formerly struggled for victory. Towards the end of the fifteenth century, tournaments, jousts and sham battles, fought with blunt wooden swords, were all abandoned in favour of bull and buffalo fights, in which much blood was often shed. A century later, as manners became less barbarous, these were formally abolished and replaced by races of mounted buffaloes. But it was soon found that with eighteen or twenty of these savage animals rushing and hustling round the steep, narrow course, almost as many accidents occurred as in the former games. Accordingly, in 1650, the use of buffaloes

was forbidden by law, and horses were employed instead. The prize of victory was now a *Palio*, or banner of damask fringed with white and lined with black and white silk. At first the competing horses were never less than twenty; later, they were reduced to seventeen; and then in 1719 it was decreed that ten only should run, and that the *fantini* (jockeys) should carry short whips, or *nerbi*, given to them at the moment of starting, instead of the long flexible thongs with which they were accustomed to drag one another from the saddle. These rules are still in force, and every year the ten racing *Contrade* are chosen by ballot from the seventeen. The *Palio* now takes place twice a year: early in July and in the middle of August, and the latter is always the chief and favourite spectacle.

The race itself is on the 17th August, but on the three preceding evenings there are trial gallops, when the Piazza is nearly as crowded as on the great day. Regarded as races, these "events" are



PALIO AT SIENA.

of course the drollest caricatures. The horses entered are of every sort and age, and taken indiscriminately from plough, cart, or cab. The jockeys are big, powerful men whose aim is to stick firmly to their saddles, without attempting to spare their horses' backs by careful riding. They need to be rough customers, for every *fantino* does his best to unseat his nearest competitors, and, whenever he finds one gaining upon him, cuts him savagely over face and shoulders with his whip.

The eve of the *Palio* is celebrated by fireworks and illuminations; and Bengal lights and Chinese lanterns play magical tricks with the grand old buildings of the Piazza del Campo.

The year that we were in Siena the race day dawned cloudless and brilliant, as all other days of the previous month, but later on heavy storm clouds gathered over the city and threatened disturbance to the festival. All Siena watched the sky, all Siena trembled. But the sun shone forth again, and before six o'clock p.m. all the world was on its

way to the Piazza. The streets were thronged with rustics clad in their best, and all the women wore gay bodices and huge, flapping straw hats adorned with bright, new ribbons and gaudy flowers. As in all parts of Italy where the *métairie* system prevails, they are a fine, well-fed, healthy-looking race. There were many beautiful faces to be seen among them, and nearly all were fresh and bright, honest-eyed and robust. The women of Siena do not compare well with their country cousins, for in their frantic efforts to ape fashions beyond their means, they are apt to load themselves with unbecoming, tawdry finery. Yellow feathers seemed to be in the highest favour.

Mounting the steep stairs of the Archive Office at the top of the massive Piccolomini Palace, we already hear the confused, sea-like murmur of the waiting thousands in the Piazza below. Our first glance from the lofty balcony seems to show us a huge black and blue carpet streaked with pale yellow, and shot with flashes of brighter colour.

The next moment we see that this carpet has life and movement; the pale yellow streaks wave to and fro; we are looking down upon a dense crowd of human beings, many of whom have flapping straw hats and multicoloured fans. The space between the course and the houses is filled in with tiers of seats—a variegated outer border—beyond the circle of the sanded course—to the thick, living carpet in the centre. Satins and brocades, red and blue, green and orange, hang from window and balcony of every house and palace; and every opening and foothold is thronged with spectators. Behind the brown-turreted buildings opposite to us, the striped campanile and galleried cupola of the Cathedral stand up in their might. Near to us, on the left, rises the graceful shaft of the Mangia tower, like a gigantic white lily, on a dark red stalk. Between it and us, and beyond low intervening roofs is a glimpse of vine-covered slopes sinking to the lowlands, where greenery makes way for soft grey and dove-like tints, with patches of sun-burnt

downs, backed by wooded hills and faint blue mountain lines.

Meanwhile brass bands of indifferent merit take turns in amusing the expectant crowd ; a sea of fans is rippling all round the Piazza on the raised seats ; the umpires and municipal authorities are taking their places on the platform spanning the Costarella lane at the farthest corner. A few mounted Carabinieri issue from the court of the Signoria Palace and leisurely proceed to clear the peopled course. An easy task this : Italian holiday crowds are yielding as softest wax ; no threats, no pressure, no uplifted truncheons are needed here ; all gently give way before the horses and withdraw beyond the boundary. Naturally when the way is clear and all ready for the race, the usual dog appears careering down the course, and is as obstinately obtuse as his English brethren regarding the way he should go. But at last he is disposed of, and the procession begins. First come musicians in light grey uniforms, with sweeping white plumes on their



AN EPISODE OF THE PALIO.

grey felt hats. They are followed by the seventeen standard bearers of the *Contrade* in fancy costumes—ranging from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century—who march slowly round the Piazza, not only flourishing their ponderous banners, but performing strange feats with them: now twirling them round their bodies, under their arms, between their legs, as though they were as easy to manipulate, as—say the tambourine of the nigger minstrel—then casting them high in air, catching them as they fall with a dexterous ease that hides all effort. Behind these whirling flags come the ten racers, and a very sorry lot they are: galled, collar-marked, raw-boned, ewe-necked, although at this moment, excited by the music and stir of the crowd, all were looking their best. One animal alone attracted our sympathy: the valiant little white Maremma pony with flowing tail and mane, whose prowess in the trial runs we had watched with interest, and for whose victory we prayed. We had heard his history and knew that

this veteran *Bianchino* was twenty-six years old, had run in these races for twenty years, and been the winner of seventeen *Palii*. His experience enables him to avoid the difficulties of the course, and no horse knows so well at what angle to take the perilous corner by the Archives where so many slip and fall. He is quite at home in the Piazza, the music and the crowd in no way disturb him ; he evidently enjoys the whole thing, and shows his pleasure by a few elderly capers and curvets. His active little legs look stiff enough just now, and we marvel how they can ever stretch out into any pace beyond the sober trot suited to his years. Yet this gallant veteran has a passion for the turf—if such a term may be applied to this stony course—and becomes restless and fidgety as the racing season draws near. Once, a few years ago, when as usual sent alone with a load of corn to the mill of the village where he lives, he faithfully performed this duty ; but then, instead of soberly returning home, trotted up the hill to Siena and straight to

the stable where he is always put up during the races. The old priest to whom he belonged is now dead, and bequeathed his *Bianchino* to a relation, with the proviso that he was not to be allowed to run after this, his twentieth season.

Meanwhile the grand municipal car has appeared in the arena. It is a comical machine, gorgeous with green and gold—a cross between a monster watering-pot and a full-sized steam-engine. The seventeen banners of Siena flaunt from its centre pole. It is drawn by four horses, with housings of black and white, and is filled with men dressed in queer white costumes of ancient cut, and crowned with modern stove-pipe hats. Each *Contrada* contributes to the procession a standard-bearer and a band of seven or eight men in fancy dress. Some—the taller ones—are resplendent in gilded armour and plumed helmets ; others wear Raphaelesque costumes, and of these the green and gold and the black and white, with Spanish slashings and beret caps with trailing feathers, are by far the most

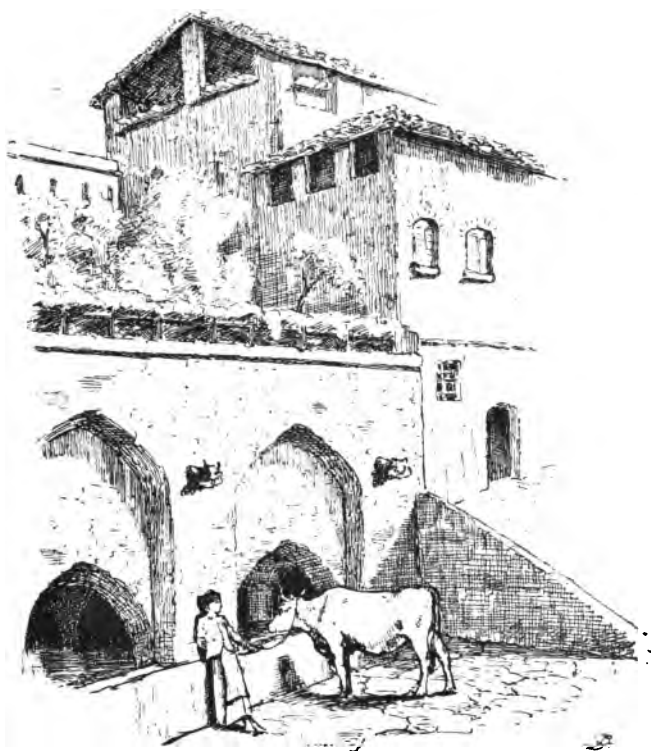
effective. Others, again, in reminiscence of the Napoleonic rule, wear the tight-fitting uniforms of the Empire made in various gaudy colours. Now appears a battlemented car bearing the city of Siena symbolized by a turret-crowned damsel with flowing fair hair. Two small boys in rose-coloured tights, representatives of Romulus and Remus, cling to her knees, and one of her hands rests on the gilt she-wolf that records the Roman origin of this famous old town. During the slow course of the procession, a tiny mortar beside the Fonte Gaia is fired off from time to time. The four-footed competitors have withdrawn, but as the cars turn away into the court of the Signoria, they reappear mounted by their jockeys, and cantering to the starting-post under the umpires' gallery, amid loud cries of welcome from the crowd, are soon hustled into a triangular, roped space. Another discharge from the mortar and the ropes fall; there is a mighty shout and the horses are off. But there is foul play at these tiny races, just as at greater elsewhere.

Far more depends upon the jockey than on the speed of the horse. This year the *Contrada* of the Sheep owned the swiftest animal ; he had won four of the trial races, and should have been first to-day. But eight *Contrade* were leagued against him, so his jockey had been bribed to lose the race. And he lost it well by quietly rolling off his saddle at the easiest part of the course, when the nearest horse was two lengths behind.

Three times round the Piazza constituted the race ; and as a spectacle nothing could be more animated, nothing finer in colouring. From the high balcony of the Archives we had an admirable view of the whole scene. The rays of the evening sun still gilded the Signoria and its tower, but the Piazza was in shade. The cries of the people grew wilder and wilder during the brief struggle. Now that the *Montone* was out by his rider's fall, the *Bruco* (Worm) and the *Chiocciola* (Snail)—the latter represented by our *Bianchino*—were in the van. For the first two rounds our little white pony kept

well ahead ; but, alas ! in the third, his pace flagged, and he only came in a good second. As the *Bruco* touched the winning-post, the men of his *Contrada* burst into the course, bore off the *fantino* in their arms, smothered him with kisses, and petted and fondled the victorious horse as though he had been a baby. Having received the *Palio*—which is nowadays a white satin banner with a wolf embroidered on it, and fringed with black and gold—the *Bruco* men marched away in triumph. They were leading horse and rider to return thanks to the Virgin in the church of their *Contrada* down by Porta Ovine, and quadruped and biped had an equal share in the loving demonstrations of the women and children of the district. Popular excitement runs so high on these occasions, that husbands, it is said, beat their wives and wives their husbands from sheer excess of joy. Let us hope that the ladies of the *Bruco* were spared similar fruits of victory.

The painful feature of these gay Sienese fêtes is the brutality of the jockeys. It is bad enough to



FONTE BRANDA.

try to hustle one another from the saddle as they turn the sharp corner by the Archives—a corner so dangerous, that here the palisades are lined with mattresses—but not content with that, every rider lashes his nearest rivals with all his strength. Some of the less courageous ride shielding their faces with their right arm. One big brute, the *fantino* of our own *Contrada*, the Hedgehog, showed more spite than all the rest, and it was satisfactory to see him left nowhere.

The race ended, all the world streamed away to the victorious *Contrada*, or to the promenade of the Lizza. This Lizza is a public park, about the size of the Round Pond in Kensington Gardens, and is to the Sienese more than Hyde Park to Londoners, or the wooded Cascina to the Florentines. Every evening, crowds of pedestrians contentedly pace its narrow limits, rest on its easy benches, and feast their eyes on the fashion and splendour of the carriage folk. On ordinary occasions there are seldom more than five or six carriages, which after driving rapidly

round and round until, I suppose, the horses show symptoms of vertigo, halt in the centre space. Then gentlemen come to chat and flirt with the ladies ; the footmen jump down and solemnly stand with folded arms exactly three paces behind their respective vehicles. But on band days there is sometimes a gay throng of as many as twelve carriages, and on this evening of the *Palio* one may almost venture to say that they numbered eighteen or twenty. Here, too, were tasteful illuminations of coloured lamps, but there was nothing of specially local character, excepting perhaps the lighted stalls where piles of big water melons showed their temptingly rosy flesh, and were quickly sold off in crisp wedges at five centimes a piece.

The following evening the so-called Roman races summoned us once more to the Piazza. The horses ran in twos and threes, and our favourite *Bianchino* won the first heat amid a storm of applause. And later, after a repetition of yesterday's pageant, he was victor in the race of all the winning horses, and

was carried off in triumph after this, his twenty-first success, to repose on the last laurels that he was to be allowed to reap.

With the shouts of the people ringing in our ears, we made our way across the fast-emptying Piazza through the crowded streets to the deserted Cathedral Square. The Duomo's chief entrance was already closed, but a side door admitted us to the hushed solemnity of the vast, silent church. A few worshippers were kneeling before the glittering shrine of the Chigi chapel; one or two lamps twinkled on the High Altar; fading gleams of evening light struggled through the high windows up above. But the nave and aisles were plunged in gloom, and the forest of dusky pillars seemed to stretch away to infinite distance. The silence and darkness were doubly impressive by contrast with the stirring world without, and we wandered reverently round the dim choir—no longer tenanted by portly canons in purple and ermine—and over Beccafumi's kings and warriors, pale ghosts beneath our

feet. Staying to rest awhile between Pisano's sculptured lions, it was easy to forget the strife of human rivalries in the charmed stillness of that grand old Italian church,

But the popular festivities were not yet at an end. On two successive Sundays open-air suppers were given in the two winning *Contrade*, and were unique spectacles of their kind.

Imagine the entire length of the precipitous narrow street dipping down from the Corso to the church of St. Francesco ablaze with Chinese lanterns festooned across from house to house in innumerable succession, and every window from ground to roof illuminated with the same soft coloured lights and crowded with women's heads! Down the centre of the narrow pavement stretched a long vista of tables garnished with flowers and fruit. Bright blossoms lay in every plate, flanked by a goodly loaf and capacious flask of wine.

These tables accommodate about two hundred guests, all members of the *Contrada*, while a more

elegant board at the end is reserved for the officers of the *Contrada* and the amateur patrons who contribute to the expenses of the feast. Near it is the table for wives and daughters, who are all singing at the top of their voices. Nor are bread, fruit, and wine the only fare; we only saw the beginning of the meal, but there were heaped-up plates of poultry and roast meat, and Comacho-like flesh-pots were being handed about. Bottles of choice wines circulated freely at the principal table, and flasks were friendly held out to strangers inviting them to drink a toast to the *Contrada*. A brass band made merry music, and the fun went on till long after midnight.

Seen from the street above, at the edge of the crowd, the long lane of coloured light, with a streak of star-sown sky overhead, seemed a glimpse of fairyland such as comes to children's dreams.

V.

AN APENNINE SANCTUARY



An Apennine Sanctuary.



IN the gorge of Bocca di Rio, about five miles from the Tuscan frontier, on the Bolognese side of the Apennines, is a lonely church, with a wonder-working Madonna much renowned in these parts. The history of the miracle to which it owes its origin is a pretty legend, although with a strong family likeness to those of other famous shrines about the world.

Some three hundred years ago two breakfastless children had gone with their cows and goats to the

pastures at the head of the valley beyond the chestnut woods. Seated under a witch elm by the water where three leaping rivulets unite in a single stream, they were bemoaning their hunger and wishing, perhaps, that, like their flock, they could feed on grass and tree-shoots, when suddenly a beautiful white-robed lady appeared before them. In gentlest tones the stranger addressed them by name, and bade them go home and eat their fill.

"Mother has no bread to give us," sighed they, shaking their heads.

"She has bread ; tell her to look in the meal chest !"

"But we dare not leave the cows and goats."

"I will mind the cows and goats. Go home and eat !" insisted the lady, with sweet command.

The amazed children gladly scampered back to the cottage. Their mother met them with reproaches. Did they not know she had nothing to give them, and how had they dared to leave the animals alone. They repeated the words of the strange lady, and bade

their mother look in the meal chest. An hour before this had been empty and tightly closed ; now, its lid was found gaping, and, wonder of wonders, it was filled to the brim with crisp new loaves !

The tale spread. All the neighbours rushed to the pasture to behold the miraculous stranger. No lady was there, only the cows and goats quietly browsing. But there was something shining among the leaves of the witch elm. Resting among the boughs lay a pretty bas-relief of the Madonna and child, in Della Robbia ware, white on a blue ground. Priests came, bore the heavenly gift to the hill-top, placed it in a rough shrine, and determined to set about erecting a chapel. But three nights in succession it disappeared, and was again found niched in the tree. Clearly, there, and there only, must the Virgin's chapel be built. Its foundations were laid, and the next morning it was found complete. Angel hands had done all the work in the night. As the fame of the shrine spread, offerings poured in, and in 1780 the present church and cloistered court were

built. Every 15th of August there is a grand pilgrimage to the Madonna of Bocca di Rio, and on its centenary three years ago, the delicate bas-relief was spoilt by the addition of a hideous gold crown.

We sojourners at tranquil Covigliaio, where there is little to do and less to see, were glad to travel ten miles to witness the yearly fête. An early start was necessary to avoid the worst of the heat on the blazing uplands, so about five o'clock a.m. we rattled off in nondescript conveyances as far as the hamlet of Traversa, a few miles from the Futa Pass, where the carriage road had to be left. Then on foot and horseback we plodded up hill and down dale for a couple of hours to reach the fine chestnut woods encircling the sanctuary. Innumerable parties of peasants were converging by different tracks to the same spot. Men, women, and children from all the country-side, from Bolognese hamlets, from Covigliaio, Pietra Mala, from the town of Firenzuola, and even from far away Tmola. Many of the pilgrims had walked through the night, and were now

sleeping in the shade of the forest or basking in the August sun on the turf. On all sides were fine groups for the painter's brush. The gorge is very narrow, and the sanctuary invisible until at the turn of the road you reach the foot of a steep straight causeway, running up to it between gigantic fir trees by the torrent-side. In this avenue a sort of fair was going on, for vendors of wine and waffles, of medals and rosaries, of artificial flowers and gaudy feathers, had set out their wares on the low walls under the firs. The cloistered quadrangle at the top was overflowing with worshippers who could find no room in the church.

Towards ten o'clock a roll of drums announced the approach of the procession. It is formed lower down the mountain at Gambellaccia, which village, together with that of Castro on the Tuscan slope, bears the whole expense of the annual celebration. To see the multi-coloured train unwind from the woods into the sunlight space, and slowly pass up the causeway with waving banners and lighted

candles, was a curious and beautiful sight. First came the band, followed by the standard-bearers wearing bright blue capes edged with gold, and priests in glittering vestments. Then a troop of young girls in white, with blue veils, and in their midst, mounted on a mule and throned on a red cloth between two oil barrels, a fair-haired babe, with fluttering wings and flower-crowned head. This was the angel appointed to uncover the miraculous Virgin. He was so small, this mortal angel, that his father walked beside him to support him in his seat, and he gazed about him with wide-open, bewildered eyes. Then came more banners and a miscellaneous crowd of men, women, and children. As the procession entered the cloister a train of priests with banners and incense issued from the church to meet it. The child-angel was dismounted and led up the steps. Formerly it rode to the foot of the altar, but of late years the practice has been discontinued—mules do not always know how to behave in church. The bas-relief, carefully

taken down and uncovered, was borne out into the quadrangle amid a burst of music. Then the *Salve Regina* was chaunted seven times—to implore a good harvest, to implore the safety of the Pope and confusion to his foes, and so on and so on. Afterwards the Madonna was carried in procession down the cloister steps and round the sanctuary, by an outer path, to another gateway before being restored to its post over the high altar.

There was an indescribable buzz of enthusiasm among the assembled thousands. All were full of faith that this pious pilgrimage would save them from all ills for a year at least. It was fine to see the flashing eyes and dramatic gestures of our guide as he recounted the legend of the place. The miraculous tree is gone, but the ugly little church bridges the water at the junction of the three torrents. Formerly it was richly endowed; now wealthy devotees are scarcer, and its nine farms have dwindled down to two.

The ceremony ended, fun began. Most of the

pilgrims took their pleasure quietly, ate, drank, rested in the shade, and brought bunches of feathers and flowers to deck their hats in honour of the occasion. Journeying back to Covigliaio when this hottest day of the year was on the wane, there was some uproar in the crowd. Much wine had been consumed, and several of the cartloads of revellers we passed on the high-road seemed to need the aid of the Virgin of Bocca di Rio to keep them safe on their jolting seats.



VI.

*THE HOMES OF THE PLASTER-IMAGE
MEN*



The Homes of the Plaster- Image Men.



IT is a well-known fact that while emigration is almost unknown to the thriving peasantry of Tuscany, the neighbouring province of Lucca furnishes a very large proportion of the wandering Italians who go to seek their fortunes beyond the seas. These are nearly all *figurinaj*, the plaster-image men who, with their trays of brittle distortions of famous statues, are to be met with in almost every part of the globe. Few peasant families of the

Lucchesi valleys are without some Gianni or Pietro, who, forsaking the parental corn- or hemp-patch, has trudged away to attack the world's oyster by means of sulphur-moulds and wax and plaster. But the Italian race being ever essentially home-loving, these Lucchesi seldom settle abroad. Sooner or later they find their way back to their native place, lay out their savings on a scrap of ground, tell wondrous tales of travel and golden possibilities, and keep up the family tradition by packing off all superfluous sons to seek their fortune in the same way. Here at the Bagni di Lucca we are in the very midst of this land of *figurinaj*, and all the surrounding villages nestling in chestnut-glades or crowning hill-tops are pointed out to us as the homes of returned emigrants. All are interesting, but Ghivizzano is certainly the most picturesque. A few miles from the Bagni, just where the noble valley of the Serchio widens out into a sunny, vine-tangled district, sloping upward over a chain of chestnut-covered hills to the bold spurs and peaks

of the central Apennines, Ghivizzano crowns the summit of one of the aforesaid hills. Encircled with high walls and crested by a tall campanile and a ruined tower dating from the days of that potent lady the Countess Matilda, it still shows an imposing front to the world, and must have been a splendid place for defence in the fighting days of Castruccio Castracani, whose birthplace it was.

And now as then, though windows have here and there been opened in the grim old walls, there is but one gate to Ghivizzano; it is still a castello—as these walled villages are called—and generation after generation of its inhabitants contentedly tramp round two-thirds of its circuit, after their day's labour in the fields, to reach that solitary place of ingress. It seems strange that no successful *figurinaio* should have brought back some public spirit as well as *quattrini* from his distant wanderings, and sought to let in light and air to the cooped-up dwellings by knocking down a few bits of the useless walls. Italians, however, are the

most conservative, least revolutionary of races, and the fact that a thing has always been, is with them an excellent reason why it should always continue to be. Besides, all the more thriving inhabitants—chiefly returned emigrants—have spread themselves outside the village, and the hill-side toward the high-road is dotted with tiny farms and a few gayly painted houses. But apart from *quattrini*, the nomadic tendencies of Ghivizzano have one result which is comical enough to the casual visitor. Halting for breath outside the gateway of this Old World Italian village, it was startling to be suddenly accosted by a voice from an upper window with a “Good evening, ma’am,” in very tolerable English. Castruccio’s ghost would have been far less surprising.

Then, as we presently dived into a vaulted passage in the thickness of the wall, which runs nearly all round Ghivizzano, the same voice—close at hand now—said: “Very bad road, that way, ma’am; you *caan’t* get on,” in an accent which told that the speaker had not studied the English

language among the "upper ten." He was quite young, but had come back from America lamed for life, and had settled down in his native place. He was beginning to tell us his adventures, when a brisk, withered old man with a face like a dried herring—before soaking—pounced upon us in a friendly way, and volunteered to take us up to the church. He too spoke English, though less fluently than the other, and gladly relapsed into his native tongue on finding that we understood it rather better than we understood his English. He was very voluble, and willing as Othello to recount his experiences. Of course he had been a *figurinaio*, and had only recently retired from his wandering business. He was the owner of a couple of houses and several fields, but his income seemed to be small—it certainly allowed no margin for soap—and he did not disdain to supplement it by filling the office of clock-winder to the commune for the magnificent weekly salary of ten centimes.

A perfect labyrinth of narrow lanes is crammed

into the tiny circuit of Ghivizzano's walls. First of all—undeterred by the cripple's warning—we plunged into the dark vaulted passage, popularly known as Castruccio's dungeons, but which probably served as a covered way of communication between different points of the fortifications. The so-called dungeons are now tenanted by captives who greeted us with friendly grunts as we passed their doors. Now stumbling over fallen masonry, now climbing steep steps, diving under this blackened archway and that, we soon found ourselves back in the main street, not far from our starting-point. We were struck by the well-to-do air of the solid, well-built, low-browed houses. Picturesquely dingy, they are neither ruinous nor poverty-stricken. Their darkness and dirt are but the natural outcome of the universal indifference of the Italian lower classes to the state of their dwellings. For them a house is simply the shelter wherein they sleep and will probably die. All else, their pleasures as their labours, are carried on out of doors.

Some of these Ghivizzano houses have outer stairs ending in a *loggia*, forming most pictorial backgrounds to the groups of inhabitants. They are by no means overrun by visitors, so we were stared at with friendly interest, and a small crowd soon gathered at our heels. The grown people looked well fed, the children fat and healthy. By the raised well in one corner of a tiny triangular piazza, two pretty girls were standing with copper water-vessels poised on their heads. Hard by, at the head of some stone steps, a black-eyed baby was dancing on his mother's lap, crowing and clapping his hands, while his pretty sister, a plump little maiden of some three years old, eating her supper lower down, flourished her wooden spoon, and smiled at us through a tangle of fair curls. As we looked at the pretty picture, we were startled by a dreary moan. An old beggar-woman was kneeling behind us with outstretched hand. The poor creature was evidently daft, for, though we gave her something, she knelt to us again a few minutes later. It was a painful sight.

But now we have mounted a long, wide flight of steps, most suggestive of old-time processions and martial shows, have reached the grassy platform in front of the church, and our guide, the *figurinaio*, is holding forth to us on the chief events of his life. He knows England well, he says, has been all over it, but seems to have closer acquaintance with its jails than with any other of its institutions. He admits that he did not confine his energies to the sale of plaster figures, but is mysterious as to his other avocations. New York he speaks of in the friendliest manner; he has been to San Francisco, but his dearest reminiscences are the glories of the city which he is pleased to pronounce Sencenati. It was there, it seems, that he made a good deal of money; but he added, with a droll twinkle in his puckery old eyes, that the greater part of it was spent before he reached home.

The Ghivizzano church is singularly poor and bare, and, unlike the generality of churches in this part of Italy, has absolutely nothing to show in the

way of architecture, pictures, or Robbia ware. But there is plenty to be seen outside its doors. Built on the very summit of the hill, its arched *loggia* rests on a rocky ledge which drops sheer down into a steep and leafy chestnut-glade. Farther on, you overlook the cluster of red-brown roofs to a great stretch of the Serchio Valley. The bold cliffs and wooded gorges of Gallicano crowd close to the farther bank of the river, and, save one luminous peak, shut out the giants of the Carrara range. But on this side of the winding, glistening river a great velvety patch of forest stretches away as far as Ponte all' Ania; little towns and villages are scattered about on the hillsides; the fields and vineyards are arabesqued with woodland strips, and miles away, perched on a bold height, and backed by the loftiest of the guardian mountains, you can see the walls and towers of Barga, once a nest of warriors, whose struggles for independence I have related in another chapter. And all this is bathed in the fleeting sweetness of the after-glow, when every

tint shows forth in softest intensity before fading into night.

But I am not long left to peaceful contemplation of evening effects. A rough-looking lad calmly seats himself beside me on the low parapet, and stares at me pertinaciously, but not impertinently. I see more boys flocking round, so I get up and peep in at the door of the dim little church. About a score of women and children are droning out their evening prayer in a melancholy chant. One or two tiny lights twinkle on a side-altar. Curiosity soon overcomes devotion on the part of the younger members of the congregation, and, having returned to my wall, I am presently interviewed by a group of little girls, who, whispering and giggling, stand a few paces from me, and take stock of everything about me. To the victim this soon became monotonous; so, singling out one of the mites, an odd little creature with a waist almost reaching to her knees, I asked her to tell me her name. This astounding request filled her with dismay, and put

her companions to flight. Her giggles ceased ; she covered her face with her hands ; she wriggled this way and that, as though I were holding her by some fearsome spell. But my companion, the big boy, came to her aid ; he was perfectly ready to answer questions. The child was his sister, and, after he had administered a few encouraging pokes and nudges, the queer thing at last gasped out that her name was Penelope, and that she was eight years of age. Having made this statement, she instantly scampered away to the other end of the *loggia*, and was soon giggling as before.

Nothing disperses small gazers like asking a few questions ; on big ones it has a precisely opposite effect.

And now I had another companion, a loquacious matron, who had two sons away in America. She eagerly inquired if I were American, and, on learning that I was English, her esteem for me diminished. Perhaps, however, I had heard of America, she added, with a benevolent smile. To these poor

people the States are a sort of earthly paradise, teeming with golden possibilities—England merely a station on the way. I asked if her sons were *figurinaj*. At first they were, she said, now they had other employments. They were good lads, sent her money occasionally, and talked of returning soon. As to how they earned their living—well, they did earn it. They could not get their bread for nothing, even in America *si sa*.

All this time the others of the party had been up in the campanile. This is not lofty, so the view is little more extended than from the *loggia* below. Hearing a voice raised in loud indignation, I glanced upward. I beheld a black and withered arm, easily recognizable as the property of our travelled cicerone, protruding from one of the embrasures, and vehemently sawing the air. I learned afterward that it was the subject of taxes which had aroused the old man's wrath. The government taxes are heavy enough, but the municipal dues are those that excite most discontent. Worst of all is the *focatico*,

or hearth-tax, paid by every head of a family; and which seems to be levied in a very arbitrary manner. The old fellow was still speaking of his wrongs when my friends came out of the tower. At a climax in his narrative he suddenly tore his cap from his head, and cast it far from him. That was a great relief to his feelings; he became calm, and the stout woman took up the doleful strain, and inveighed in her turn against the *focatico*. And now the vesper prayer was over, and the scanty congregation joined our crowd outside. From the shadowy arch of a side-door appeared a vision of age and infancy worthy of a master's brush. A haggard, bent, and withered crone, on whose wrinkled visage there yet lingered in some strange way traces of long-past beauty, came tottering down the step holding by the hand a plump darling of a baby boy, with laughing eyes, gleaming little teeth, and a thick crop of curly brown hair. The one was so feeble, the other so young, both trod so uncertainly, that it was hard to say which supported the

other. Half leading, half led, withered feet and baby toes stumbled toward the *loggia* till they reached one of the dismal stones covering what was, till a year or two ago, the general grave-pit for Ghivizzano's dead. Here the poor creature sank down on her stiffened knees and mumbled out a prayer, perhaps for some long-lost love of her own, perhaps for the father of the sturdy babe clinging to her skirts, and to whose arm she still clung. Soon we placed a bit of money in the boy's little, grimy hand, and the grandmother—or great-grandmother—croaked out her thanks, and told us that Tonino could not talk, being not yet two years old. Certainly Tonino was a splendid little fellow, and his lips parted in an amiable, confiding smile as his fingers closed over his coin. His manly costume of trousers, braces, and shirt only gave fuller emphasis to his rounded, baby limbs. As the couple tottered away, the poor old woman in her feeble agedness looked as though her sole hold upon life was through that infant, whose strength lay all before him.

The gloaming was almost over now, the chestnut woods fast losing their colour ; so, hurriedly going down another narrow street and up a steep vineyard path, we scrambled to the ruins of Castruccio's fortress, which are so thickly set about with trees and vines that nothing is to be seen when you get there.

A fresh crowd of men, women, and children was in waiting to escort us to the town-gate. We asked one woman if she too had been in America. "No," she said with a sigh ; adding, as she glanced around at her companions, "but we would all go directly if we could." And her companions nodded and echoed the wish.

But who was this whom we suddenly caught sight of, sitting on the wall with folded arms outside the gate ? Surely this respectable, black-coated, straw-hatted man, with shaven cheeks and a grey goatee beneath his chin, could be no native of Ghivizzano ! But, in spite of his transatlantic appearance, he was only a returned *figurinaio*. He began to talk to us immediately, and spoke of his travels. He knew

English well, had sold plaster images in the States, sold fish at San Francisco, lived at Montevideo, and had been to all the East Indian Presidencies. Like all the rest, he spoke enthusiastically of America, but objected to the climate of the East Indies. Things had gone well with him, he said ; he liked wandering about the world, and but for his family and his farm down there among the chestnuts he should be ready to go away again to-morrow. There was plenty of business capacity in his keen old face ; also, if his eyes did not belie him, a turn for sharp practice. In his way he was a praiser of past times. Those were the days for business, when he was young, he exclaimed, with an expressive flourish of his arms. Especially in California ; there, indeed, one made money. Now—with a contemptuous movement of his under lip—now *affari* went badly. *Affari* were at an end almost everywhere. We thought we had heard something like this before from men in other ranks of life. Then he gave us some information about Ghivizzano. It contained, he told us, fifty-seven families ; nearly all had houses

of their own, their pasture, their scrap of land. Few were exactly poor, none exactly rich. Wasn't he rich? Well, he had nothing to complain of; he might have been worse off. But the taxes were terrible, and the commune harassed them sadly. No—Ghivizzano was not a commune in itself, only a fraction of that of Coreglia, and one had to tramp all the way up in the hills there to pay the *focatico*, etc. Did all his fellow *figurinaj* come back with their pockets as full as his own? Certainly not; "*one had to know how to do business!*" The Ghivizzano men weren't as successful as some others. Did we see that village right away up there upon the hillside across the river? Well, that village had grown rich, positively rich, by the trade. The trade wasn't what it once was, when he was young—but what else could one do with all one's boys?

And, indeed, with the swarms of tiny children that we had seen surging round the corners and overflowing the doorways of Ghivizzano, it was plain that many of these human figures would have to earn their bread by figures in plaster.

VII.

ITALIAN MOVING



Italian Moving.



It is impossible to live long in any Italian city without being struck by the perpetual changes of habitation of all one's friends and acquaintances. With the exception of the local aristocracy, who generation after generation are born, live, and die in the same massive family mansions, no one seems to care to pass more than one or two years in the same house. And as for the small-fry of seamstresses, milliners, and work-people of all kinds, once a year is hardly often enough to make a fresh list of their

addresses. The great "fitting" days here in Florence are the 1st of November and the 1st of May ; so, for a week or so before and after these dates, the streets are encumbered by vans, carts, and hand-barrows, piled with miscellaneous articles of furniture — piled so high too, and so lightly secured, that it is marvellous how they escape ruin, or reach their haven unwrecked. Naturally, more people move in the spring than in autumn, when, what with rain, wind, and mud, it is difficult to avoid more or less damage to all your goods and chattels. In England a move is only undertaken after long reflection and careful consideration of ways and means, for even wealthy families may shrink from rushing lightly into the expense and trouble inevitable to a change of abode. How, then, is it that here in Italy the very classes to whom expense is no trifling thing, and whose incomes are reckoned by francs, not pounds, are precisely those who are continually transferring their Lares and Penates to fresh quarters—now east, now west, to the north,

or to the south of the town? It can hardly be in search of comfort, for, even with plenty of money at your command, it takes a certain time to adapt yourself to a new home, and, with the probability of changing again within six or twelve months, it is hardly worth while to remedy its defects or fit your belongings to their new position. But, as a rule, Italians are ignorant of the first elements of material domestic comfort. The houses are made to be let, not to make their inmates comfortable; and when the builder of middle-class dwellings has placed the kitchen in convenient proximity to the dining-room—and generally to the entrance-door of your flat—he conceives that every requirement has been fulfilled. I am inclined to think that the continual “fitting” of people of small means, here in Florence, merely shows that most houses are so comfortless that it is seldom possible to change for the worse. And as people with a national disregard for comfort and home elegance care little for harmony between wall-papers and furniture, and seldom possess any

carpets worth mentioning, few of the obstacles, which—mere expense apart—surge up in the ordinary householder's mind at the idea of a move, have much power over the Italian *paterfamilias* when he decides to give his landlord warning. Indeed, when his purse is low, change is almost a measure of economy, owing to the prevailing Florentine method of rent-paying. As I have said, houses let from the 1st of May and the 1st of November, but this by no means implies that your rent only falls due at those dates. You positively have to pay it over eight months in advance, that is, about the middle of February or August, for the term beginning with the following May or November. Thus by giving notice and avoiding actually fixing another apartment until a week or so before leaving his old one, the impecunious Florentine can stave off the evil day of payment at least two months. So, from this and other causes, it sometimes happens that you see one family tumbling into their new quarters the very day that its old occupants are tumbling out ; and

great are the confusion, turmoil, litter, bad language, and general mixing up of rickety possessions thereby occasioned. Yet after all there is little of the genuine anxiety or excitement manifested by northerners on similar occasions. The dramatic gestures, the pagan interjections that apparently mean so much, are for the most part mere conventional expressions and modes of speech. As a rule, no one is out of temper, no one in a hurry. Life is long and moving short, might well be the motto of the upholsterer and carpenter, who are the usual superintendents of these domestic changes. For the extent of their zeal is to get the beds you sleep in, the tables you eat on, transferred to the new house from the old within the hours of their working-day. Other things will right themselves naturally in course of time; these are the sole essentials, and your Florentine *paterfamilias* demands but little more. His children are revelling in the general disorganization of domestic matters, and if his wife be in despair, well, he can always

slip off to his *café* out of hearing of her shrill grumblings. And—as many of my readers may know—the soft Italian tongue does not always issue very softly from the feminine mouth.

Then, as for the servants, they enjoy the upset almost as much as the children. Disorder is their natural element. Unlike English domestics, who object to doing anything but their own work, Italian servants throw into extra and abnormal labour all the zeal which they can seldom be persuaded to devote to their daily duties. To them it is a positive treat to go without their regular dinner for once in a way ; a delightful variation to refresh themselves with slices of ham or sausage from the nearest shop, seated on a pile of bedding, or a case of crockery, and carrying on sportive conversation with gay young *facchini* (porters) and carpenters.

And here let me say *en passant* that, although Italian maid-servants are but too commonly lazy, untidy, slipshod wenches, doing as little as they can, and only blossoming into energy on *festa* days, when

—leaving everything at sixes and sevens—they sally forth in gaudiest festival array ; and although the best of them seldom accomplish more than half of the daily tasks of a British handmaiden, yet an Italian man-servant is the very best in the world. He will do three times as much work as an English indoor-man, for here men are kept not for show, but for use ; and English or American people wintering in Italy would spare themselves much annoyance by conforming to the customs of the country, and engaging men instead of women for kitchen and parlour work. For, if chosen intelligently, your Italian man-servant is a treasure. He may fail to lay the table with consummate elegance, certainly he will not keep your silver at its highest polish ; but, besides his regular work, he will always be ready and willing to assist the other servants. He will make your beds if required, nurse your baby, button your boots, and be generally depended upon for all manner of odd jobs.

Not long ago an article appeared in a well-known London paper containing some very sweeping stric-

tures upon Italian servants, which, though doubtless entirely unexaggerated, would have had greater value had the writer mentioned what part of Italy was the scene of her woful experiences. The Boot comprises so many different races, different degrees of civilization, that what is perfectly true of one part of the peninsula fails to give any correct view of another. Florence, for instance, is by no means famous for good servants, yet the present writer, during a residence of many years, has never had the ill luck to fall in with any such desperate "ne'er-do-wells" as those described in the paper on "Italian Servants *versus* English." There is one point which, it seems to me, English employers do not sufficiently take into account in dealing with their Italian servants—namely, that it is best to be content with modifying certain of their national characteristics, without wasting time and temper in vain endeavours to convert them into the well-trained, noiseless domestics of an English household. Taken at their worst, they have the qualities of their defects, and

that is why they are so active and helpful in the (to them) delightful business of a change of house.

Now, to give a good notion of a move conducted on the approved Florentine principle, it will be as well to relate my personal experiences while shifting our belongings from a noisy street on the south side of the Arno to our present lovely home on the sunny second floor of an historic palace with the finest garden in Florence. A garden as yet untouched by the local modern mania for prim beds and rockwork, set about with noble trees, radiant with flowers, and musical with bird-voices and the splashing of fountains.

The first question to be settled was whether to employ railway-vans, and thus effect an expeditious move regardless of breakages, or to confide entirely in my upholsterer and let him transfer our chattels in far slower but also far safer fashion. And, as everything had to be carried down the one hundred and two stairs of the old apartment and up the sixty-seven stairs of the new, at the opposite end of the

town, it seemed better to give up all idea of the reckless innovation of moving everything at once, and content one's self with the easy-going, old-fashioned ways. Accordingly, my worthy upholsterer is summoned from his littery shop in Via Romana, where perpetual quilting of cotton counterpanes is carried on, and he is requested to name his price and say in how many days he can undertake to strip our rooms and put all things in order in the new home. His wrinkled, smiling visage, not unlike that of a benevolent frog, and which nature certainly designed for a comic actor rather than an upholsterer, instantly expands into a broader grin than usual. How long would he take? He shifted from one leg to the other, scratched his head, enjoyed the comic aspect of British haste, and finally committed himself to the opinion that all might be done in four or five days, provided the weather held up.

We were in October, so continued fine weather was far from certain; but perhaps if we began at once, since the new apartment was already at our

disposal, we might be settled before the autumn rains set in. So it was finally arranged that he should begin in a day or so, and that he was to provide the necessary carts and horses. This he undertook, twinkling more merrily than ever as he bade us farewell; and on the appointed morning we were aroused at a very early hour by the arrival of four men and a boy, and much creaking and banging, rustling of straw and clatter of crockery told us that the dismantling process had begun. This energy promised well, and already we imagined ourselves installed in our newly papered south rooms overlooking that bright garden, and we briskly rose and proceeded to the packing of books and dresses, with a feeling that there was not a moment to be lost.

Going out an hour or so later, we were in time to witness the starting of the first load. But where were the horses and waggons which imagination had shown us standing all this time beneath the archway at the bottom of our hundred and two steps? All that was to be seen was a moderate-sized hand-cart,

easily propelled by two men. We were—so to speak—about to be moved in a wheelbarrow! No wonder that that perfidious old man of the comic countenance had twinkled so merrily on being invested with the responsibility of choosing vans and horses! But we were already sufficiently imbued with the spirit of the land of our adoption to resign ourselves to fate and the upholsterer, and hope for great results from small commencements.

And for the first two days all went smoothly enough, and the cheery presence of Signor Giovanni the upholsterer at least gave animation to his men. As for the small boy, edict of banishment had to be pronounced against him. We had had misgivings of him from the first, and he soon justified them. With the reckless *abandon* of youth he had pounced upon a carefully-packed basket of English crockery, and, choosing to imagine it empty, hoisted it upside down on his head. One instant, and the floor was scattered with fragments of toilet ware only to be matched in the Strand.

Then a steady rain set in, and we shivered over a small fire in a curtainless, carpetless room, speculating as to whether the chairs and tables carried downstairs a couple of hours earlier had reached their destination before the storm broke. Only later did we ascertain that they had gone no farther than the archway. No oilcloth was forthcoming to cover the contents of the cart ; and the men, we learnt, were too heated by their exertions to be able to venture through the streets in the rain ! Florentines cherish the delusion that wet weather is so extraordinary an occurrence that no provision need be made against it. Even for pianos no covered carts are used ; they are paraded through the town exhibiting their silk and varnish to all beholders, and merely fastened by leather straps to small trucks.

So once more we had to resign ourselves to fate, and for a whole week the rain beat against our panes, and all that could be done was to hang pictures in the new home, arrange the few articles already there, and bid beaming Signor Giovanni (whose smiles

began to seem fiendish) profit by the delay to complete necessary alterations of window-cornices and curtains.

Complete ! we little knew how far from completion all these things were.

Only at the end of twelve miserable days were we able to surrender the keys of our old home, and bid good-bye to our southern view, across closely-clustered roofs, of fair Bellosguardo and the ilex avenue of Poggio Imperiale—only at the end of four months did we see the last of carpenters and upholsterers in our new abode. For, as soon as we were encamped—I may not say settled—in the palace with the garden, our comic upholsterer deserted us, and went to beam elsewhere upon other people's carpets and curtains. The only result to be attained by stern messages and supplicating appeals was an occasional flying visit, at the oddest hours, from one or other of his sons.

Coming home wearied out in the dark winter afternoons, and hoping for an interval of rest and

solitude before dinner, we would be startled, on entering our bedroom, by a voice as from the skies, and behold the airy Beppo—the tasteful member of Signor Giovanni's family—perched on a ladder, putting up bed-curtains that had been in his hands for weeks. Another time, still later in the day, we found the stout Cesare—whose figure was so valuable in the stretching of carpets—nailing a forgotten trimming on our favourite arm-chair.

A propos to carpets, the Anglo-Saxon mind has to abandon all accustomed grooves of thought with regard to these useful elements of comfort. In England—until Oriental rugs and Indian matting came in fashion—we had a fixed idea that they should be cut to fit the rooms for which they were intended. In Italy, on the contrary, it is considered great waste to cut off corners and edges. These can be turned under, you know, ready for use in case you have bigger rooms the next time you move. And so, always with an eye to future changes, your upholsterer cannot see the necessity of fitting your

carpets to your present floors. When you indignantly show him how all these hillocks and protuberances prevent your furniture from standing firmly against the walls, how every piece is toppling forward, you are smilingly asked to have patience. Then, in a twinkling, little wedges and chips of any sort of wood your carpenter may have left about, are inserted beneath the tottering legs, and you are triumphantly begged to observe that all is now as it should be. And gradually you come to think so too, and renounce struggling against the inevitable, at least as regards the laying of carpets.

But on one point you must be inflexible, or madness might result.

Florentine carpenters and cabinet-makers take measurements as accurately as can be desired, but they seldom conform to them, and I shudder to think of the time and energy required to have a curtain-cornice made to fit, and when it does fit to have it put up in a straight line.

It is a very complicated proceeding. First of all,

iron clamps have to be inserted in the wall, and, as neither upholsterer nor carpenter will undertake this job, you have to secure the attendance of an iron-smith with the clamps, and of a mason to fasten them to the wall. Then the carpenter has to prepare the wooden framework to which cornice and vallance are to be nailed. The mason can do his share of the performance independently ; but, if you cannot assemble upholsterer, carpenter, and smith at one and the same time, dire confusion follows. The clamps are too short, or the board too narrow, or the cornice too long. All preliminary flourishing of the foot-rule has been in vain if your trinity cannot discuss the matter on the spot. And one day the carpenter is engaged, the next the upholsterer misses his appointment, the third no smith is forthcoming ; and so on till you despair of ever seeing the pile of curtains in the corner hung up in their appointed places. When at last, after long delay, you are invited to come and see how elegantly they have been draped, you find, to your horror, that the whole

erection is hopelessly crooked, that all must be done over again.

But here so many harrowing recollections crowd upon my mind that it is best to turn to pleasanter subjects.

This moving tale would be incomplete without some mention of another prominent character in it. Let me introduce my carpenter. He is a thin, wiry man, with a sour mouth and self-asserting nose of the particular kind of *retroussé* which experience disposes me to regard as significant of the intensest conceit. This worthy has his merits: he is quick, active, and tolerably punctual, and if he would confine himself to his special business, and note down his measurements, he would be a very satisfactory carpenter and joiner. But, unfortunately, he is apt to consider himself a slighted genius, and thinks that he, and he alone, should have the supreme command of all that is going on. He had a severe attack of wounded pride on finding that wardrobes which he had made were, in the course of the move,

taken down and put together again by the profane fingers of Signor Giovanni and his minions. He could have done it all in half the time, he said, without help from any one. This man's wife is a needlewoman, and, happening to want a cradle trimmed in a particular fashion, we told him to send his wife to do this under our own superintendence. He promptly offered to trim the cradle himself, and I had to acknowledge a weak preference for needles and thread rather than hammer and nails, before being allowed to obtain his wife's services. She came ; but to my amazement her husband came too ; and, as he bullied her into executing my orders according to his own peculiar interpretation of them, the result was not completely satisfactory. He, however, was highly delighted with the achievement, and confided to one of the servants that he knew that he could fit ladies' dresses far better than his wife. This man's burning desire is to be first fiddle on all occasions, and we have had to leave off engaging him as waiter on company nights, simply .

because he tries to usurp the reins of government, and, instead of helping our servants, orders them about in a totally absurd and exasperating manner.

And now, having said so much of the troubles of our move, this paper may fittingly conclude with a description of the house in which they came to an end. Possibly we may have to move again some day, but meanwhile we consider ourselves settled, and love our picturesque abode in spite of its sundry defects. Above all, it is an historic palace,¹ for its owner and our landlord is the most noble Count Ugolino della Gherardesca, lineal descendant of him who met his death in the Hunger Tower of Pisa. Over the principal entrance is a huge coronet sculptured in stone, but close beside the gate, by which we tenants enter, is a marble slab recording that here, in the days of Savonarola, dwelt Bartolommeo Scala, Secretary to the Republic, and husband to a daughter of the house of Gherardesca. Pushing

¹ It has been sold, since the Count's death, to the ex-Khedive, Ismail Pasha.

open this heavy gate, we find ourselves in a gravelled court divided from the garden by railings that, in this summer season, are thickly garlanded with clustering roses and the graceful foliage of the wisteria, soon to be crowned for the second time by scented wreaths of lilac blossoms. Then turning in by the porter's lodge under the arcade, we climb one of the steepest stairs in Florence, and have time to lose our breath before being stopped by a tall iron gate beyond which more stairs await us, and which is our frontier fortress. And, to add to its defensive appearance, there is a small opening in the wall above through which the garrison may ascertain whether friends or foes are ringing the modern substitute for the horn of the Middle Ages. But as the gate closes behind us, and the door at the head of the stairs is opened, we have a glimpse of Dante's Florence, for we see three slender towers in a gracious group beyond intervening roofs and gardens.

These are Arnolfo's Tower, its smaller rival of

the Bargello, and the spired belfry of the Badia. The marbled mass of the Duomo hides from us all save one corner of Giotto's Campanile, and quite shuts out the lovely hill of Bellosguardo. Going out into the long balcony that stretches from wing to wing of this southern front, we look over the garden where huge magnolias hold up to us their creamy chalices of scent, and great South American firs sweep the lawn near the camellia-hedge with their trailing branches. Close to our farthest window a tall tulip-tree stands almost within reach, and covered with pale, red-flecked flowers about which foraging parties of bees are ever circling. Beneath is the arcade where Tito Melema showed his stolen gems to Bartolommeo Scala, and brought his learning to bear on that bitter strife of epigrams in which the fat historian had just been worsted by Politian.

Farther off to the west is a stalwart stone-pine, which even in Scala's time must have been of long growth, and our one western window looks down on a soft, green lawn dotted with azaleas and enclosed

by a grove of lofty trees. And, climbing another and still steeper flight of stairs, we come out on a turreted terrace, from which we can see half Tuscany. The city lies before us against its background of southern hills; Fiesole is behind us; to the east we look away to the Falterona, Vallombrosa, and the Arezzo Mountains; to the north-west we have the chain of the Pistoian Apennines; to the south-west the translucent Carrara Peaks are visible. Trees and gardens fill the foreground; beyond are towers and domes and cypress-streaked hillsides dotted with numerous villas. All day the landscape quivers with white heat, mists, or soft blue haze. Toward evening these clear away, and sky and hills rival each other in glorious tints found nowhere but on Nature's palette. By day swallows cry sweetly in their circling flights; by night nightingales raise their voices in the Gherardesca thickets; the chiù-owl gently hoots his little joys and troubles; the screech-owl perches on a neighbouring roof and gives out his dismal note; frogs innumerable babble

and trill and croak in all the pieces of water ; fire-flies flash among the trees like falling fragments of the stars gleaming overhead ; and only now and then a rattle of wheels and passing shouts in the quiet street remind us that we are not in the country, but within half a mile of the noisy heart of the city of Florence.



Venetian Waters.

I.

SUMMER IN VENICE



Summer in Venice.



“ Venice seems the type
Of life—'twixt blue and blue extends a stripe,
As life, the somewhat, hangs 'twixt naught and naught.”

ROBERT BROWNING.



ENICE in summer! To most ears the words seem synonymous with much heat, bad odours, and mosquitoes innumerable. These are there, it is true, yet may all be escaped. Venice is the one city of Italy where summer days need not be spent in darkened rooms, where heat may be defied, and evening glories and the cool, salt breath of the lagoon bring delights

far outweighing the chance discomfort of fervid noons.

But to enjoy your summer it is essential to live in private lodgings. Then, and then only, you feel the full charm of Venetian magic. No tourist-talk breaks the spell, no dinner-bell curtails your study of sea and sky, and every door can be left open to invite free draughts of air. Instead of the irksome glare and chatter of a crowded *table d'hôte*, you have the choice of quiet meals in your own dim dining-room, of frugal repasts beneath the vines of the artist-haunted restaurant, on the Zattere beside the Giudecca Canal, or of set dinners at the Lido Baths, where courses of changing effects on waves and sky and distant strip of tree-fringed coast feast your eyes better than the too-dilatory dishes nourish your body.

As for the dreaded mosquitoes, their numbers are few until the hungry swallows have flown, and they are too well engaged on fresh English blood in the hotels near the Salute and along the Riva to make many raids on private houses.

The ideal Venetian lodging should be, of course, in some palace of historic name, with carven balconies, painted arches, and lofty, echoing halls. Such lodgings, however, are seldom to be found, and you usually have to content yourself with more plebeian surroundings, and satisfy your soul with local colour of a humbler sort.

Fate led us to San Samuele, and gave us a modest dwelling, shrinking back on a little Campo on the Grand Canal, placed between Ca' Malipiero and Ca' Grassi, opposite the massive Rezzonico Palace, for which even Renaissance-hating Mr. Ruskin can find no word of blame. Thus we commanded a space of the great highway, and had a perfect Venetian view across the water, down winding Rio San Barnaba, with its bridge and brown tower, tall grey campanile, irregular patches of roof, and fan-shaped chimneys. The vine-trellis shading our *traghetto*, or gondola-stand, was a pleasant object in the foreground ; there was a sculptured well in the campo beside us, and the belfry of St. Samuel was built into our house,

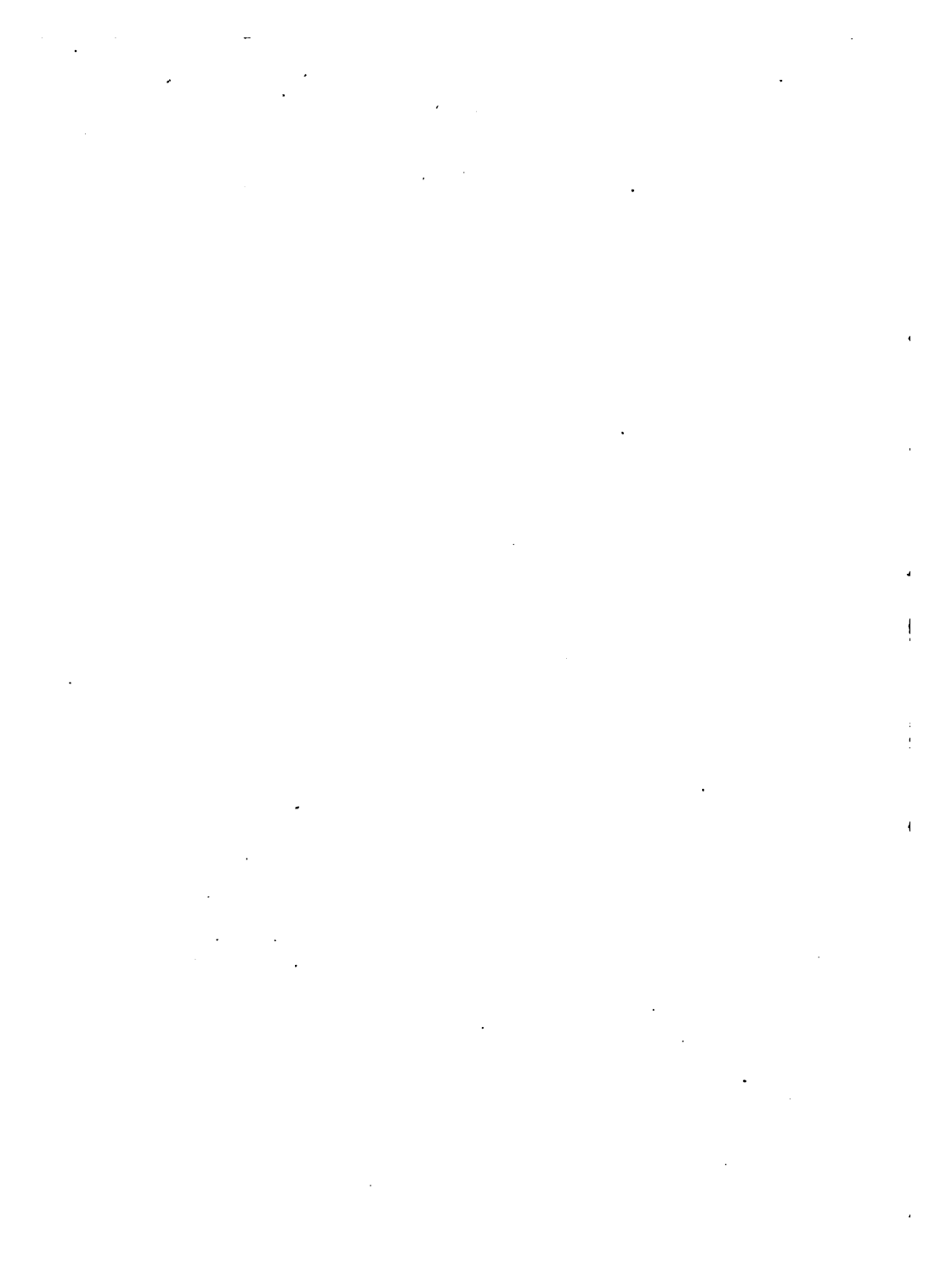
and bounded our scrap of roof-terrace to the rear. Viewed by moonlight from the canal, it seemed a fit scene for operatic love and crime. Cloaked hero, for instance, rushing on to the Campo from side-street L. to meet veiled lady tremblingly advancing from side-street R. ; impassioned duet before the row of gondolas—or footlights—interrupted by enraged parent issuing from palace R.F. ; fierce combat and clashing of swords ; organ music, procession from the lighted church ; grand tableau—lovers saved by benevolent priest.

Never live near a *traghetto*, say old Venetians ; and, we might add, never beside a well or in front of a belfry. But although at the cost of quiet, our position had undoubted advantages for insight into local manners and customs.

Daily at 5 a.m., St. Samuel's iron voice reminded us that we were in Venice, its vibrations shaking us in our beds. An hour later the clang of copper pails, clinking of chains, and shrill clatter of housewives' tongues announced the opening of the well. Soon



CAMPO S. SAMUELE.



the ringers were again at work in our belfry, the piercing whistles of the "tram" steamers—most disturbing of modern utilities—began to resound from the canal, and the every-day business of Venice was fairly begun. As for the gondoliers of our *traghetto*, they were never quiet : all hours seemed alike to them. Like the poet's hackneyed brook, they too ran on for ever. They seldom ceased quarrelling with one another excepting to wage a fiercer war of words with their brethren of the opposite stand. Hailstorms of invective were always flying back and forth across the water. The only truce to the undying feud was when both sides joined in volleys of bad language against their common foes, the penny steamers that have so wofully diminished their gains. One day one of these steamers chanced to foul the nearest landing-stage, and instantly the air was rent by the derisive howls of all the gondoliers within sight. But if our noisy crew had little work, neither did they take much repose. Towards 11 p.m. there would be a promising lull in their disputes ; they

would indulge in prolonged and prodigious yawns. Custom was growing scarce, there were fewer foot-steps on the pavement, fewer cries of "Poppe"—the signal for hailing a gondola to ferry you over the canal—came to summon them to their oars. Surely they would slumber at last, and allow silence to reign in our Campo! Not at all! Within half an hour they were livelier than ever—all fatigue had evaporated in yawns, and they had so much spare energy that they were driven to vent it in sudden bursts of stentorian song, and thus excite the emulation of their San Barnaba rivals. Luckily the air of Venice is soothing to new-comers, so we learnt the art of sleeping through the din, and it was difficult to wake at any hour without hearing it going on almost as briskly as before. The only tranquil time was just towards daybreak.

A Venetian dawn in July is well worth the cost of a sleepless night, and its clear-eyed frankness as beautiful in its way as the mysterious fantasies played by moonlight on walls and water. Naturally here

at San Samuele, midway up the Grand Canal, you miss the splendour of sunrise on the sea to be enjoyed from the Riva ; but lack of horizon is almost balanced by the added suggestiveness of effects within the narrower range of vision. For instance, this is what we saw during the small hours of a July morning. First, the soft twilight, that had never been gloom at any period of the brief night, gradually paled to a faint whiteness in which the slender, grey, angel-topped campanile down our favourite opening by the Rezzonico walls seemed to lose all substance and become a 'cloud structure—a mere film instead of a pile of stones. The sturdy brown tower of San Barnaba wore a deeper, warmer tint as the light grew and the stars died out. A few tiny cloudlets began to dapple the clear zenith, slowly expanded, and were slowly suffused by a delicate flush that presently deepened to a vivid rose, streaked with grey and backed by darker wool-packs. By this time the swallows were on the wing, circling swiftly in the air, and emitting their

sharp, sweet note. Pigeons, too, were flitting down from cornice and house-top, with much velvety flutter and melodious whirr. Sparrows, pert and well-plumed, darted this way and that, and hopped lightly about the deserted pavement. One or two boats appeared on the canal ; the eyes of Venice were beginning to open for the day. Soon a great barge lumbers past laden with fresh water from the mainland. It is so full that a bare few inches of woodwork save the " sweet water " within from mingling with the brackish element without. How unkempt and sleepy-eyed are the red-capped bargees so patiently trudging the length of their craft, with shoulders hard-pressed to their punting-poles ! Theirs is no easy trade ! With favourable wind and tide they have had at least an eight hours' sail ; with wind and tide against them, it is sometimes a two days' journey. Yet their cargo of water only brings them five francs ! Having reached its destination, the barge is quickly tackled by a busy little engine, which, with much noise and fuss, distributes its con-

tents into smaller boats, that in their turn fill the public wells by means of far-reaching hose. This spectacle has a certain analogy with the diffusion of knowledge by the daily press. Every one receives his modicum of the precious supply; but how few give a thought to the patient toilers, the pursuers of original research, who, like our bargees, have brought the knowledge from its distant source!

The sky was still bright with the freshness of early morn, there were blue spaces still mottled with rose; but the tenderly blushing cloudlets had gone, just as the joyous smiles of infancy vanish in the gravity of manhood. Storm-clouds were now thickening over the lagoon to the south, and although unseen from our San Samuele windows, they had sent their messengers before them. Dark brownish masses began to encroach on the azure overhead, and this was already touched here and there by the tiny brush-strokes of the wind.

Morning was full-blown now, and a cool breeze at last brought sleep to nerve us for the coming heat of the day.



II.

CAMPO SAN SAMUELE



Campo San Samuele.



KNOWING that every inch of Venetian ground, every street and square and bridge, every *Campo* and *Rio* and *Calle*, *Salizzata* and *Fondamenta*, has some historic associations to compare with those of the arched and pillared palaces that are better known to fame, we made haste to inquire into the past of our own humble Campo, and the humbler network of devious lanes in its rear. Putting aside one or two ugly tales of crime, the following are all the particulars we were able to glean.

The Church of San Samuele, only open for early-morning service, pending repairs, dates from the beginning of the eleventh century, but having been twice partly destroyed by fire was almost entirely rebuilt in the seventeenth century, and our noisy belfry is probably all that remains of the original structure. The church contains no works of art worthy of mention, but the parish is rich in artistic memories.

Titian once possessed a studio hard by in the house of the architect Bartolommeo Buono. The sculptors Giulio, Tullio, and Antonio Lombardo lived at San Samuele; and it was the birthplace of Modesta da Pozzo, a learned lady of much repute in the sixteenth century. Paolo Veronese spent his last years in the Casa Zecchini, and died there in 1588 of a fever caught by taking part in a grand Easter procession. His sons and grandsons, painters all, continued to live there, and in their days the house was enriched by many of the elder Caliari's works. Girolamo Campagna, too, had once plied his chisel

and fused his bronze in the same building. Several artists of lesser note like Girolamo Pilotti, the follower of Palma Vecchio, Ridolfi, the painter and biographer of painters, and Pietro Literi, whose profitable brush enabled him to build himself the palace now known as Casa Morolin, also lived within sound of our bells. Here at San Samuele the notorious adventurer, Giacomo Casanova, first opened his audacious eyes, and may have passed his early years in squabbling on the Campo with other ragamuffins, hooking gondolas for a copper coin, and diving in the canal on summer nights, much after the manner of the nineteenth century imps, whose shrill voices made a frequent treble to the deeper tones of our gondoliers. And here, in later and comparatively respectable days when employed as a spy of the Inquisition, he may perhaps have penned the famous report in which he denounced the possession by various Venetian gentleman of many impious and prohibited works. The list is curious, and includes the works of Voltaire and Rousseau, the

“Esprit” of Helvetius, the Belisarius of Marmontel, sundry productions of Diderot and Crébillon, the “De Rerum Natura” of Lucretius, Bolingbroke’s “Examination,” the writings of Machiavelli, Spinoza, &c. The pious criticisms of the white-washed rogue were somewhat sweeping in their range. His white-wash, however, had rubbed off by the time he composed his scandalous memoirs and miraculous escape from the *Piombi*, in the Bohemian castle of his last patron.

Being flanked and faced by patrician abodes, our modest Campo has had its share of the festive shows for which Venice has at all times been celebrated; but its noblest pageant must have been that of the wedding of Lucrezia Contarini and Jacopo, son of Doge Francesco Foscari, on Sunday the 29th of January, 1441. Then a crowd of patrician guests in festal attire, and mounted on gaily caparisoned steeds, rode to the Campo from all quarters of the town, and crossed the canal to San Barnaba on a bridge of boats erected for the

occasion. The Serenissimo went in person to meet the bride at high mass in that brown-towered church, and later an open-air sermon was preached on the Campo without to a great concourse of hearers, "tanti zenti lomeni e puovolo che no se podeva andar in alcun luogo"—so many nobles and townsfolk that there was no room to stir. And in the evening the Bucintoro brought a hundred and fifty noble dames to lead the bride, escorted by a fleet of skiffs and gondolas to her new home in the Ducal Palace, where the wedding festivities were prolonged far into the night. Fortunately, no astrologer seems to have dimmed the brightness of the day by foretelling how soon this joy was to be turned into mourning: the gay young bridegroom made the victim of relentless persecution, and his splendid father stripped of his state, and left to die of sheer misery in his family palace at the turn of the canal! Foscari's successor, Doge Malipiero, also abode at San Samuele, and the sculptured archway of his palace in the Salizzada frames a

dainty garden scene with fountain and statues in the background.

We are indebted to Signor Tassini's "*Curiosità Veneziane*" for many of the foregoing details. This volume is a valuable guide to Venetian wanderings; gives the derivation of the nomenclature of canals and streets, and the legends and associations of every monument and building. It is of little use, however, from the artistic point of view, and its information is imparted in very dry-as-dust style. For genuine study of the stones of Venice there is of course no guide comparable to Ruskin's noble volumes. Putting aside abstract theories and mystical imaginings that may or may not accord with the temper of your mind, it is impossible to read those eloquent pages without gaining a new pair of eyes. It is as though you had bathed your lids with the magic dew of fairy-land. You have at last learned the language of the stones. Every arch and capital, every moulding or fretwork or finial has suddenly acquired a new significance.

You recognize and appreciate exquisite details where before you only felt a vague and general enjoyment of a lovely whole ; you are guided to the discovery of fresh treasures, and initiated in the arcana of architectural truth, or, as Mr. Ruskin might say, of that morality which is the essence and logic of art,

While on the topic of aids to Venetian study, the works of Signor Molmenti must not be forgotten. His "*Vita privata di Venezia*" is a storehouse of interesting facts and details of Venetian manners and customs from the earliest times, and includes a lucid account of the laws of Torcello and *Rivo Alto*. He describes the ceremonies attendant on birth, death, and marriage during many centuries ; we turn over the wardrobes of gentle dames, peep into their kitchens and cupboards, and are shown inventories of their household goods.

Then, in the same author's "*Vecchie Storie*," a dainty volume published by Messrs. Ongania, and illustrated by the pencil of Favretto, we are served to some curious records and choice bits of scandal.

In one paper, "Il Maldicente," perhaps the gem of the book, we are treated to extracts from the unpublished correspondence of an eighteenth century gossipmonger. The Abate Ballarini was agent and factotum to the Magnifico Daniele Dolfin, Ambassador to the French Court from 1780 to 1786; and made it part of his duty to regale his employer with all the chit-chat and scandal of the town, as well as with every political rumour and event likely to be serviceable in Paris. True parasitical spite pierces through the obsequious tone of these lively communications, for the Abate does not scruple to repeat every ill-natured criticism upon his Excellency's doings in France. He gives him full details of theatrical affairs in Venice, being quite aware that the Magnifico has a special interest in the *pirouettes* of a certain fair dancer now performing in Venice for the first time on the San Samuele stage. He describes the splendid *fêtes* given in honour of the Russian Grand Duke and his wife in 1782, and all the gossip of which

they were the theme. He is enthusiastic about the temporary theatre erected for a species of bull-fight in the Piazza San Marco, with a triumphal arch in the style of the *Porte St. Martin*!! But the Abate is nothing if not critical, and his tongue wags best when recounting malicious anecdotes of the leading beauties and personages of his time. The paper on Andrea Calmo contains much novel information on that sixteenth-century poet and dramatic artist. His comedies, written in dialect, probably merit the oblivion into which they have fallen, but his correspondence, to judge from the sparkling extracts given by Signor Molmenti, must be full of original pictures of sixteenth-century Venice.

This humbly born Calmo, the son of a gondolier, was the pet of patrician society, the correspondent of the most prominent men of his age. He had a passionate love for his native city, "la nobile, digna, odorifera, grande, prestantissima, vereconda cittae de Venesia;" and repeatedly sings the praises of the "golden isles" of this "pleasant place, the

jewel of Italy." The *fêtes* of the old Republic are brought vividly before our eyes by his description of the entry of the Dogaressa Zilia Dandolo Priuli. How modern regattas and *freschi* and illuminations pale in comparison with the lavish splendour of the glittering Bucintoro; the gold and silver brocades and precious stones of the noble company, the manifold decorations, draperies and festoons at St. Mark's; the display of plate at the collation served by *five hundred* bravely accoutred waiting-men, the forest of wax-candles; the fireworks going on for six hours, the sumptuous public supper, the three days of dancing and merry-making! But now and then, in the midst of the mad whirl, the pleasure-sated poet changes his note to a cry of lament for the good old times when men wore leathern jerkins and women turned from their mirrors with unpainted cheeks.

In a paper on the Moor of Venice, Signor Molmenti recapitulates the best-known hypotheses as to Othello's identity. He disputes the ingenious

theory of that learned scholar, Mr. Rawdon Browne, and suggests that the following anecdote, in a letter dated 1st June, 1602, from Bishop Bollani to Ser Vincenzo Dandolo, may have reached Shakespeare's ears, at the time when he was writing "Othello," and suggested the death-scene of the play.

"The day before yesterday a Sanudo, living in the Rio della Croce, on the Giudecca, compelled his wife, a lady of the Cappello family, to go to confession, and the following night, towards the fifth hour, plunged a dagger in her heart and killed her. It is said that she had been unfaithful to him, but the voice of the neighbourhood proclaims her a saint."

III.

BY SIDE CANALS



By Side Canals.



N a forlorn corner of Venice, not far from the Madonna dell 'Orto, where Cima da Conegliano's great picture is enshrined, we come to the grass-grown Campo St. Alvise, with its blistered garden-walls and cluster of crumbling buildings. There is plenty of time to look about us before the bottle-nosed custodian comes shuffling over the bridge with the keys of the little-frequented church. We have come to seek the earliest productions of Carpaccio, and here they are on the wall of the nave, eight in all and mere

daubs, although the promising daubs of a gifted twelve-year-old boy. They are scenes from the Old Testament—Job and his comforters ; Solomon and the Queen of Sheba ; Tobit and the Angel ; Moses and the Tables of the Law ; the Golden Calf ; Joshua before the Walls of Jericho ; Joseph's Brethren imploring Forgiveness ; Jacob and Rachel at the Well.

These early efforts of the future illustrator of the legends of St. George, St. Ursula, St. Jerome, &c., have little intrinsic worth, but much historic interest, since all crudity and stiffness notwithstanding, they show the budding dramatic power and keen observation of the future master. And they are the only records of his youth, for few details are known of Carpaccio's life. Even the date of his birth is uncertain, but may be placed towards the middle of the fifteenth century, as he was an aged man at the time of his death, in 1524. The first of his great works is dated 1490, the last 1522. It is a disputed point whether his name

was Scarpaccia or Carpaccio, a disputed point whether he was a native of Venice or Istria; but recent research has almost decided this question in favour of the latter place. The St. Alvisé panels bear the painter's usual signature. In the quaint representation of Jacob's meeting with Rachel, we at once notice the horse stooping to feed. The action is very truthful, and the forelegs have the defect—disproportionate length—common to all Carpaccio's horses. But, as in his after works, the story is capitally told, the central idea seized, although the brush is feebly handled, and the drawing that of a child.¹

This poverty-stricken church must have once seen better days, for it possesses several excellent works of art. There is a fresco by Bonifazio—The Last Supper—almost identical in composition with the oil-painting by the same master in the Florence

¹ We have since heard the authenticity of these panels disputed, and attributed to a seventeenth-century imitator of Carpaccio. But Signor Molmenti, a great authority on Venetian art matters, declares them to be genuine.

Academy. The Judas is specially remarkable as a study in red and brown. Here, too, are a couple of Tiepolo's *chefs d'œuvres*: the Scourging in the Temple, and Christ sinking under the Cross. They are noble paintings both for colour and design, and painted in the master's most serious mood. No frolicsome angels mar the solemnity of the themes. Nevertheless, like all this master's works, they bear a prophetic kinship with those of the French school of thirty years' back. They might have strayed from the walls of the Luxembourg to this decaying Venetian church.

The last of the Venetian colourists is unfortunate in his surroundings, for some of his best productions are hidden in the Palazzo Labia, in the Canareggio quarter, near the railway station, and are seldom discovered by strangers. The palace stands sideways to the canal, divided from it by a stretch of pavement. It fronts an unsavoury Fondamento, whence, after ringing at a blistered door, you pass into a spacious entrance hall, foul

with odours unmentionable and strewed with flakes of plaster dropped from the cracked and bulging vault above. A grandiose staircase faces the mouldy courtyard in the centre of the block. Ascending its grimy steps you are met by a frowzy portress, fit guardian of decay, whose slipshod feet lead the way into a lofty saloon with wide cracks in the walls and depressions in the floor corresponding with the unsightly bulges seen from below. Here are Tiepolo's frescoes of the loves of Antony and Cleopatra and the Allegory of Fortune. The visitor's first impression is one of blank disappointment, for the story of the Egyptian queen is coarsely treated, though vigorous in design; and this buxom, blowzy Cleopatra, with ruff and stomacher and powdered toupee, so ostentatiously melting her pearl before the enamoured eyes of her Roman General, is, to say the least, a droll anachronism. But there is a charming group of pipers and trumpeters in the background, delicate, vapourous figures, somewhat after the manner of

Hamon. On the opposite wall is seen the arrival of Mark Antony, and on the ceiling the Allegory of Fortune, a truly excellent work. It is sad that treasures like these should be left to perish amid all this dust and decay! A school of Mosaic workers occupies the front rooms, and you have to pick your way among heaps of glass cubes, pots of cement, and a confusion of benches, tables and boys, to obtain a view of the remaining pictures. The rest of the building is let off to tenants of the poorest class who air their rags on the sculptured window-sills and balconies.

Sic transit gloria mundi! About a century ago this massive Renaissance palace was the meeting-place of the fashionable world, for the Labia exercised a princely hospitality, and had a private theatre, where many operas were acted by mario-nettes and sung by good artists behind the scenes.

On the same day we gained admittance to the Palazzo Morosini, at Santo Stefano, one of the best preserved relics of olden Venice. It still belongs to

the Morosini, and the present representative of the family allows it to be seen by special appointment. Landing at the water-door in a dark and narrow canal, you are received by ancient serving-men with shrunken faces and loosely hanging coats, and ushered straight into the seventeenth century. The chilly entrance hall is adorned with quaint oil sketches of the thirty-seven strongholds captured by Francesco Morosini in the Morea. The huge lanterns of his war-galley project from the end wall. There are full-length portraits of the conquering Doge and of many illustrious ancestors. The Maggiordomo appears and gravely leads you upstairs into a long suite of saloons with gorgeous, uncomfortable furniture, a large collection of pictures—good, bad, and indifferent—quantities of rare old china of Eastern and native fabric, and innumerable relics of the hero of the house, Doge Francesco, surnamed the “Peloponesiaco.” There is his bust in bronze, with memorials of his prowess; and the resolute features are those of a leader

of men. The one thing lacking to this typical Venetian dwelling is an outlook on to the Grand Canal. Nearly all the windows open upon the "Calle Stretta," or into mildewed courts ; and the only sunny corner, at the angle of Piazza Santo Stefano, is devoted to the armoury, filled with spoils of victory over the Turks. A forest of infidel banners and flags droop from the walls in heavy silken folds, amid a store of Pasha's tails, shields, trophies of arms and armour, guns and mortars, statues, busts, and bas-reliefs. This fortunate general captured no less than 1,360 pieces of artillery, and evidently looted on a vast scale, inasmuch as the lion's share of his gains must have gone to the State. The sun streamed into this picturesque hall and through its wide casements. We looked on to the flower-filled terrace of Countess Morosini's private rooms.

The gem of the picture gallery is Titian's portrait of Doge Grimani ; a marvellous painting of an astute old face, with piercing narrow eyes and

seamed with countless wrinkles. His union with Morosina Morosini can hardly have been a love match, on the lady's part at all events. Beside this masterpiece hangs a good Sir Peter Lely, representing a bouncing blonde with frank blue eyes, supposed to be the portrait of Christina of Sweden.

The collection naturally includes many scenes of Venetian life by the prolific Longhi; they are very inferior to those in the possession of Mr. Rawdon Browne, but there are some female heads in pastel by the same master which are specimens of his best work.

This home of the Morosini is almost the only notable Venetian palace still owned by the family for whom it was built, and no other has retained so rich a collection of art-treasures and relics. But even at burning midday in mid-July it was cold—cold as the grave. Surely only disembodied spirits could take their ease in those stiff and chilly saloons? We could imagine the long-deceased Doge and a select company of family ghosts gravely stalking

through them by night, and trying to warm themselves by sipping hot coffee—for which the Doge had acquired a taste in the East—from the dainty cups so primly ranged on shelves during the day. That there are ghosts in Venice is known to every one. Is not that fine, grim-fronted palace at the turn of the canal, *Palazzo Contarini delle Figure*, perpetually changing hands, because no tenant can long endure its nightly horrors? The present owner has stripped it of its furniture in the hope of getting rid of the ghosts, but no one takes it, and its supernatural occupants now have it all to themselves.



IV.

ON THE LAGOONS



On the Lagoons.



N this summer season, when every hour of the day brings a fresh feast of colour, fresh enchantment, the charms of outdoor Venice often outweigh those of churches and galleries. We feel sated with intellectual pleasure, dazzled by painted glories, wearied by study of different schools of art. It is better to be in the sunshine, out in the actual world; to drift lazily in our gondola, and with no definite object in view, to simply enjoy the living scenes around us. Nowhere are the details of everyday

life so picturesque as in Venice. If the sun's rays prove too piercing, we tell our gondolier to moor us in the shade of the big P. and O. anchored off the Riva, and resting on our black leather cushions, survey the shifting panorama from this post of vantage in the centre of St. Mark's basin.

There is the usual fleet of fishing boats by the public gardens, and their many-hued sails, brown and yellow and crimson and amaranth, are none the less effective against the foliage' because of long intimacy. We have seen them on a thousand canvases, panels, and bristol boards, yet they are always a delicious surprise.

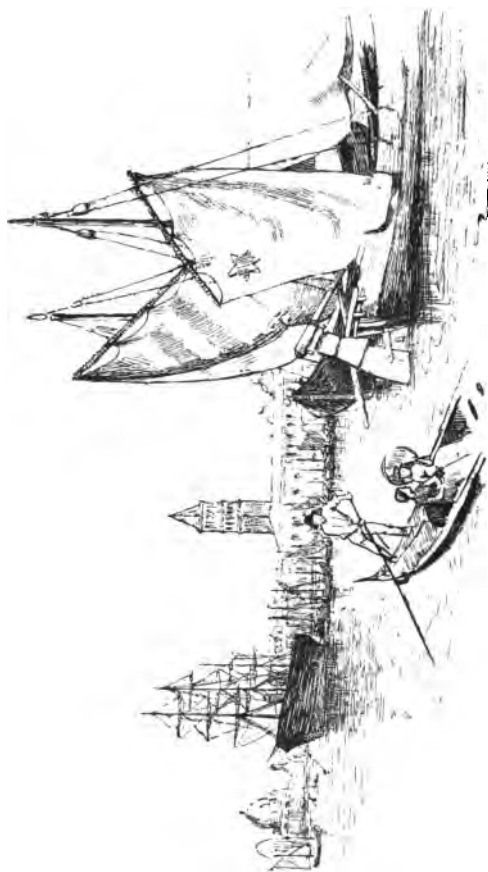
San Giorgio's slender tower seems half transparent against the delicate afternoon sky ; we can hear the voices of the soldiers on the barrack-ground at its base, and we cannot see the ugly Palladian *façade* so awkwardly exalted on its preposterous stilts. Some covered gondolas are creeping along like black spiders in the distance ; and close to us sweeps past with rapid strokes a boat manned with

Dalmatian sailors. Their vigorous, blue-clad forms, crisp, brown locks and beards, honest faces and bright blue eyes look very familiar. Of course! We have seen them before, somewhere on the shores of the Adriatic, in the funeral procession of two poor little twins—that is to say, in that noble symphony in blue, Michetti's picture of the Morticini.

What a contrast between these stalwart men of the sea and the slender Lascars, whose turbaned heads project over the bulwarks of the P. and O. towering above us! Here comes a fruit-boat laden with pyramids of crimson peaches and piles of green water-melons for the morrow's market. It lies low in the water, and like yonder skiff seems in danger of being swamped by the swell of the Lido steamer with its return cargo of bathers. These *vaporetti* are necessary evils during the bathing season, and so too are the trams that convey you across the sun-burnt island; but the crowd and turmoil of arrival and departure destroy half the pleasure of your daily plunge in the sea. Now a horrible sound

strikes the ear, far echoing, yet sepulchral as a voice from Hades. It is the fog-horn of an enormous Greenock steamer slowly feeling its way down the channel to Malamocco. Gazing in that direction we are edified by the steadfast industry of a young painter. For he has tied his boat to a cluster of piles, fixed his easel on top and, standing with one foot on his gunwale and the other on a convenient post, is hard at work through the blazing afternoon, reliant on the handkerchief flapping from his hat for protection from sun-stroke. His ardour excites applause. What painting executed in the comfortable seclusion of his studio could satisfy the soul of that young man so much as this study—probably of fishing boats—achieved under such difficult circumstances? Little will he care for blistered nose or aching head when he looks at the result of his day's work! How pleasant it would be to play the art-patron and purchase that sketch at a high price! For it should surely be a talisman, conferring the gift of persistent effort!

What is this string of empty, brown-sailed craft



CANAL ORFANO.

being towed by a tiny tug towards the Giudecca? They are picturesque enough in their dingy, mud-stained way, but we view them with angry eyes, for they carry the dredgings of Venetian canals to enlarge the works at St. Elena. A few months ago this same St. Elena was a winsome garden isle with a half-ruined monastery and church; and on passing through dusky courts and cloisters, you emerged into the soft, green light of a luxuriant vine-trellis, and looked on to the Lagoons over flowery lawns set about with lofty trees. Now trade and progress have seized on the unlucky island, and by dint of mud and piles are extending it on all sides. A huge chimney is daily mounting higher and higher, workshops are replacing the trampled flower-beds, and there are rumours of a bridge to connect it with the Lido for the passage of tramcars over the Lagoons.

And this is the end of the dainty pleasaunce where the girl-heroine of Mr. Sturgis's¹ delightful

¹ "An Accomplished Gentleman," by Julian Sturgis.

Venetian tale suddenly leaped into womanhood at the voice of Love!

May it not be said that the associations of fiction are even more precious than those of history? A newly discovered document may at any moment befoul the memory of your best-loved historical personage; but the heroes and heroines of romance defy vicissitude, and are crystallized in perennial goodness and beauty. It is strange how few Italian writers have used Venice as a background of fiction. Goldoni's comedies certainly give vivid portraiture of its eighteenth-century life; and the fine novels of Ippolito Nievo and—in a minor degree—Castellnuovo's "*Quaderno della Zia*," lead us up the stream of time into the fading splendours, the ferment of changing ideas of the waning Republic. But for vivid presentment of the colour and mystery of Venice, we have to turn to foreign writers: to Goethe and George Sand, to Shelley, Byron, Ruskin, and a host of lesser talents whose best inspirations have been born of the Lagoons. For instance, it

needs a poet's pen to describe the joy of sailing over the summer sea to this or that outlying island. The swirl of the parted waves makes cheery music as the wind swells the painted sheet rigged to your gondola. If the tide be low half the lagoon is changed into olive fields of sea-grass, dotted with groups of men and boys groping for crabs—*belle bestie*, as they are called here—and other shell fish ; and shrimpers wade through the shallows pushing their nets before them.

And the lagoons are full of surprises. Out at St. Erasmo, the islet near St. Andrea del Lido, you seem suddenly transported to Holland. You glide up a narrow water-way between grassy banks hedged with bushes and pollards ; meadows and vegetable gardens lie on either side, and it is only on reaching a tiny landing-place in front of a tinier, red-tinted chapel flanked by tall cypresses, that you realize that you are still in Italy. Out into the broad water once more, and a few minutes bring you to the fort of St. Andrea with its massive Palladian

basement. It was here that in old times the Bucintoro was moored during the ceremony of wedding the Adriatic, but nowadays it is a place of punishment for refractory soldiers. A short stroll through the lush grass takes you to the outer corner washed by the surf of the open sea. The waters are still heaving with the half-spent rage of the previous night, and further out the white horses are tossing their crests in the sunshine. It is a long pull back to Venice with the wind and tide against us, and we envy the Chioggia boats which are able to sail so close to the wind, that they skim past with equal speed on almost every tack.


Having no western view from San Samuele, nearly every evening we row "out to the west as the sun goes down." A short cut by the Priuli Canal, where Gothic façades alternate with humble modern dwellings; past the home of Gaspara Stampa, the unlucky poetess, who learnt in suffering what she told in song; past the marble blocks at San Gervasio, shaded by grand old acacias, gnarled

and twisted with centuries of life—brings us out among the merchant craft of the Giudecca Canal. The rays of the sinking sun make a burnished path on the water; we are floating in golden light with rosy clouds overhead. We have passed the loungers on the Zattere, and the splashing, shouting boys swimming to and fro with fish-like ease; the hum of the city is left behind, the sound of church bells comes softly to our ears over the glowing water. We are out on the *Laguna Morta*; see the green islets dotted over its polished surface, and the peaked Euganean hills rising from the sea like dusky amethysts into the golden haze. The after-glow brightens and fades, and in the solemn stillness of the gloaming we coast round the tail of the Giudecca, past a no-man's land of brand-new islets. Their raw mud and sand will soon be clad with crops and vines like the luxuriant gardens hard by which, only a few years ago, were made in the same way from the dredgings of the canals. We wind about the shallows and mud-banks by narrow channels,

and skirt the groves and vineyards that once belonged to the suburban retreats of the Venetian nobility. Fashion, however, has long deserted the Giudecca, and it is now given up to factories and workshops.

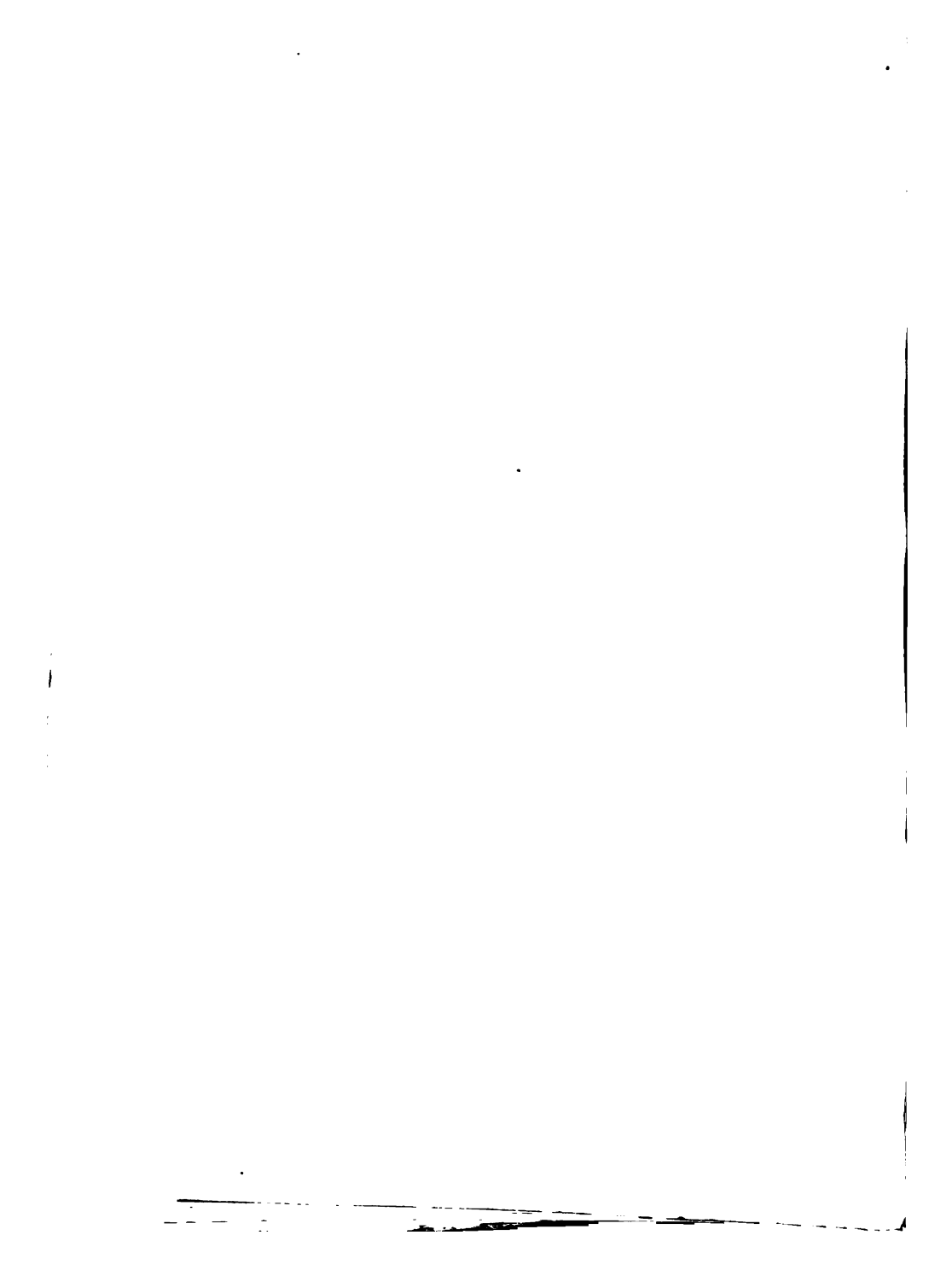
The stars are all out, the moon rising, by the time we reach the open lagoon beyond San Giorgio. Lights are twinkling on the Lido, white-sailed schooners flitting down to Malamocco seem phantom ships suspended in the air above the intervening islands. Our boat drifts gently with the tide, but the channel piles are apparently gliding swiftly out to sea. Snatches of song float to us across the water, the rounded hulls of empty *trabacoli* slowly pass on their way to fetch fresh cargoes of wood from Istria, and moonbeams trace a silvery path for our return to Venice.

St. Mark's is ablaze now with its pyramids of lamps, the band is playing, and crowds of gondolas are hastening towards the Piazzetta. The lighted windows on the Grand Canal frame glimpses of



bright interiors, pictured walls, and coffered ceilings. There has been a fire somewhere in the city, and we meet the engine returning to its station at Palazzo Manzoni. It hisses past with infinite fuss and fury, its funnel sending forth a constant shower of sparks. A most incendiary engine : better suited, one would think, to set houses on fire, than to extinguish their flames.





V.

S. FRANCIS IN THE DESERT



S. Francis in the Desert.



MUCH might be written of the Lido villages and sands, of the San Lazzaro convent—glowing like a pomegranate fruit among wreaths of foliage—of the ancient churches and flourishing glass-works of Murano, of the dreamful solitude and wonderful sculptures and mosaics of Torcello—only these are well-worn themes scarcely admitting of fresh description. But far away in the north-eastern lagoon lies the unfrequented islet of San Francesco nel Deserto, with its lonely monastery belted with

cypresses to shield it from winter blasts, and with a solitary stone-pine set like a watch-tower at its southern corner towards Venice.

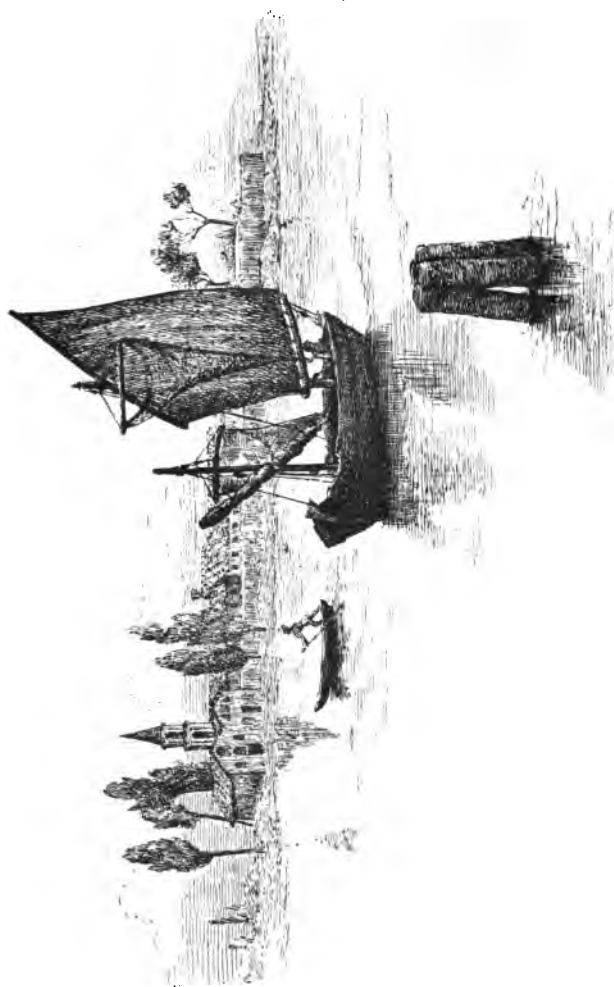
This northern lagoon is of sterner beauty than the crowded waters to the south. Far away to the left it is bordered by a narrow strip of plain, backed by the mountain ranges of Friuli and Cadore. These sweep round its waters in noble lines and curves, broken here and there by shadowy peaks. On very clear days the soaring mass of the Pelmo and the snows of Mont' Antelao are distinctly visible ; and the aged Titian in his fine palace near the Fondamenta Nuove must have often cast wistful glances towards the giant guardians of his boyhood's home. To the right lie numerous verdant islets like loosely-strung emeralds, and the towers and domes of Murano do not long shut out the view of those of Mazzorbo and Burano, overtopped by the taller belfry of Torcello behind. The one repellent feature of the lagoon is the unsightly blank wall of the burial-ground of San Michele. " So small an

island," cries our boatman, "and yet it can hold all Venice!" But why need this place of rest wear the aspect of a dungeon for the dead? Must a *memento mori* be inevitably as hideous as the death's head of a penitent's cell?

At low tide the shallows about Murano shine like burnished mirrors; forests of weed wave unceasingly to and fro beneath their clear surface, and the green blades are studded with the little pearl shells that, when polished, are woven into the well-known trinkets that fill so many shop-fronts at St. Mark's.

On the day of our voyage to San Francesco we ran aground among these shells; for while the veteran rowers of our companion gondola chose the circuitous route by the channel posts, our more daring Antonio attempted a short cut. He had never run aground, he said, and seemed convinced that his gondola could float in a tumbler-depth of water. But the waving weeds came nearer and nearer to the surface, we stuck midway, and Antonio and his handsome mate—the ideal of a

stage brigand—had to turn out into the shallows and shove and tug for many minutes before we were again afloat. It was ignominious to have to go round by the channel after all, and be received with broad grins and mild jeers by the cautious rowers of the other boat. But Antonio laughed good-humouredly, shook back his curls, and, spreading his sail to the breeze, took us across the lagoon at a grand pace, far ahead of our friends. Past the forlorn islets where gunpowder is stored, and where forlorn sentinels watched our flight with wistful eyes; past huge rafts, long and sinuous as sea-serpents, with little huts upon them, and patches of moss and lichen that spoke to us of the Tyrolese forests, whence they had been torn. Presently our course changed, our sail flapped, and leaving the huddled houses and factories of Burano to the left, we made straight for the ruddy tower of San Francesco nel Deserto. It is no uncheerful desert at this season, though doubtless dreary enough in winter storms and fogs. For its southern windows



S. FRANCESCO NEL DESERTO.



look over to Venice, and through the summer haze walls, towers, and domes are faintly seen—vague and unsubstantial as a city of air. Far away to the west stretches the soft green line of the mainland, only broken by a few slender bell-towers, mere black lines against the thick cloud-curtains now veiling the mountain world behind. Grass-lands and belts of foliage close in the view to the east.

A narrow causeway through a slip of meadow brings us to the convent porch, where a hale and portly Franciscan bids us a hearty welcome. But we defer our visit to the church ; our first duty being clearly to make tea for our thirsty guests. By a gate bowered with flowering oleanders, we enter an orchard close where the gnarled and stunted trees are knee-deep in grass. We wade through it to the encircling dyke and its double row of cypresses ; and having found a sheltered shrine for our spirit-lamp, revel in the wonderful view. Our artist-friends seize their sketch-books, forgetting both hunger and thirst, for there are subjects on all

sides. Fantastic interchange of land and water formed by the scattered weed-flats and flowery meadows; the long shadows of the cypress trees, the ruddy tower and rounded chancel of the Lombard Church, the fan-shaped chimneys and irregular roof-lines of the straggling convent, the tender tints of the lagoon, and, best of all, the visionary city rising from the sea to the south. The beacon pine-tree is invisible from this side, and, being within the convent garden, may not be approached by female feet.

Time passes quickly; the sun is low. We seek our smiling friar and hasten into the church. It is a dim and shadowy interior at this hour, and little of the clear evening light finds its way through the narrow windows. Behind a grating near the high altar we are shown San Francesco's rock-hewn cell, containing a life-size effigy of the saint. We are puzzled by the geological anomaly of a rocky cave on a sandy isle; but perhaps San Francesco brought it with him from Assisi. On turning into the choir

our irreverence was checked by the apparition of a similar figure, equally emaciated and rigid, seated in the darkest corner of the church. This, however, was a living monk wrapt in prayer, and apparently unconscious of our intruding presence. Another haggard form slowly emerged from the shadows and disappeared through the doorway. It was reassuring to glance at our stout Franciscan—there was nothing ghostly about him—and to follow his substantial tread into the outer court. Here there was little to attract the eye, but through a corner door we were allowed a glimpse of the inner cloister with delicate twisted columns, and a fine sculptured well surrounded by radiant beds of carnations and gladioli. Our jovial guide seemed justly proud of his flowers, and instantly bustled in to pick us a handful. He told us that the brethren were twenty in number, but this may have been a pious fiction in honour of his patron saint, for our gondoliers, who had frequently entered the convent, assured us there were only eight. Of course by law the com-

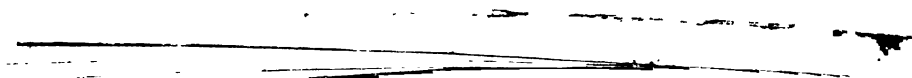
munity is suppressed, but the law cannot prevent the purchase of the building by some private individual who brings friends to live with him, and chooses to dress in brown woollen robes. Of course, too, by law there is no *clausura*.

Once a lady artist, burning to see some famous picture buried in an Italian monastery, presented herself at its gate, and urged her legal right. The case was submitted to the Superior, who blandly acknowledged that the law of the land entitled her to enter ; but added, that as by the rules of the Church cloistered ground was desecrated by woman's step, he was sure she would kindly submit to be carried in by her coachman. The lady went away without seeing the picture.

But now the distant line of spires and domes, the arsenal walls and soaring tower of San Francesco della Vigna, stood out darkly against the glow of the great red sun ; and the thickening storm-clouds over Burano reminded us that seven miles of water lay between us and our home. We raced the storm

and won ; for although its ragged edges threatened to descend upon us, though thunder growled and lightning flashed, a sudden wind presently arose and drove it away to the north. It was high tide by this time, and there was much traffic on the lagoon. Painted sails were flitting in all directions ; we passed many Rialto-bound fruit boats and crawling barges with nondescript cargoes, and each and all added to the charm of the scene. We met a fat Franciscan returning to his cloister from a day of business—or perhaps pleasure—in Venice. He sat enthroned on a chair in a tiny *sandalo*, was sipping some cordial from a case-bottle, and gave us a very spiteful glance as we exclaimed at his pictorial value.

Reaching the Fondamenta Nuova just as the lamps were lighted, we shot through the city at a splendid pace, and found all the gay world assembling to hear the band at St. Mark's. The stir and animation of the southern lagoon was almost bewildering in contrast with the silent waters behind us, with the cypress-girdled isle in their midst.



VI.

FESTIVALS AND FISHERFOLK



Festivals and Fisherfolk.



LOOKING back on those Venetian days their memory blends into a phantasmagoria of colour and sound, of lights and music and sunlit stir alternating with the sweet solemnity of moonlit waters. For summer in Venice is a season of festivity, and although the unique spectacle of a Venetian regatta was missed this year, there were many picturesque sights to compensate for its loss. There was the yearly *fête* of the Redentore, with its procession of priests and banners; when for two whole days a

motley crowd tramps incessantly to and fro over the bridge of boats thrown across the Giudecca Canal, and passes in and out beneath Luca-della-Robbia-like wreaths of living fruits garlanding the portal of the church dedicate to the Redeemer. There was the usual growth of tents and stalls stretching along the quays on either side, and hiding their everyday squalor by a profusion of flags and coloured lanterns and the shining brass chargers of the venders of *fritelle*. No wonder that the pilgrims—fisherfolk and peasants, soldiers and citizens—thronged to the lively scene. Plenty of cheap toys and gingerbread and ices and fennel for the weary children; and solid food and drink and crisp *fritelle*, hot and hot from the pan, and improvised dancing-halls for the elder folks. And as the sun went down illuminations came out. Rockets and Roman candles shot into the air, and fancifully decorated boats, with lanterns shaped into the semblance of fuchsias and lilies, competed for the prize awarded to the best device.

Then, later on, gondolas fitted with bountiful supper-tables, decked with lamps and greenery and crowded with holiday makers, began to glide past. For was not this the Redentore *fresco*, when it is a time-honoured custom to spend the night on the water and cross to the Lido to see the sunrise? But on this anniversary half at least of the Venetian world was drawn to the further end of the town to greet the arrival of Queen Margherita. Long before her train was due the broad water in front of the station was so thickset with boats that you might have crossed the canal dryshod. The court gondoliers, whose scarlet liveries and pointed hats made them seem half brigands, half postillions, had to struggle through a phalanx of intrusive prows, for the police were unable to keep a clear channel for the royal cortege. Every one wanted a sight of Queen and Prince, and pressed alongside with more loyalty than decorum. It was easy to understand why the Sovereign was seldom seen in her gondola, and preferred to use the trim little steamer moored off the

palace garden. Thus at least she secured privacy, and a certain distance betwixt herself and the gazing crowd. It can hardly be one of the pleasures of royalty to have every movement scrutinized by thousands of staring eyes, and shortsightedness must be a positive boon to those born to the purple. What wretchedness too must be theirs if endowed by spiteful fairy godmothers with a downright craving for solitude!

Nevertheless the most world-worn monarch—even a Charles V. at San Juste—would have owned the charm of this Venetian welcome. The canal was a wonderful sight, a shifting scene of fantastic splendour and mystery. For in place of the steady glare of ordinary illuminations, every palace on either bank started into life and light as the Sovereign passed: greeting her with a sudden glow of Bengal fires that revealed clusters of eager faces in every window and balcony, and shone on the thrusting, pushing, striving throng of gondoliers and gondolas below. The effect was magical. One

moment a vista of dark water edged by shadowy lines of wall and roof, the next a vision of coloured splendour in which every detail of carven arch and pillar was distinctly seen, and the ripples flashed like liquid gems.

Glancing back towards the Rialto, the moving throng below was impressively framed by its arch, and the rows of human beings on its parapet were suddenly transformed into crimson fiends. Then by dashing through the silent gloom of side canals, we gained the open water by the Palace Garden in time to see the procession sweep down the last reach of the Grand Canal amid gleaming lights and fireworks, bursts of the National Hymn and storms of enthusiastic shouts. The basin of St. Mark's was a flower-garden of flame. St. Giorgio was ablaze with Bengal fires—red, white, and green. Ironclads and frigates had their yards dressed with coloured lanterns, and the dancing lights on the lagoon were countless as the stars overhead.

The royal visit brought many repetitions of similar

festivities. There were several official Serenades, when the town band embarked on a painted barge, decked with festoons of lamps and tinsel, was towed up and down the canal by dozens of straining rowers, alternately white as angels, or demons fiery red or ghastly green in the flare of the changing lights. And always an attendant fleet of gondolas crowded in their wake, seeming, as we heard a child say, "just like ducks round a swan."

Then came the festival of Santa Margherita, when a thundering salute of twenty-one guns wished her Majesty many happy returns of the day, when every palace hung out its banners and brocades, and the tricolour drooped in the breezeless air from the great standard-poles at St. Mark's.

But on this, as it chanced, the hottest day of the year we fled the city turmoil, and started for Chioggia, in time to be deafened by the loyal guns of the guard-ship, *Varese*. In the clear morning light every sculptured detail of the Ducal Palace was defined in strong relief, every shadow was intensely

dark. The lagoon was gay with fishers' sails of every tint from canary yellow to tawny brown. We were in a mood to be pleased with everything, for all lovers of Venice will appreciate the excitement of going down to the sea for the first time—for the first time to Chioggia! What memories of olden strife and conquest, of besieging fleets and ducal pageants, of Goldoni's plays and of beautiful women are aroused by that one word Chioggia!

The tidal flats, those green fields of the sea, lay bare as we steamed down the channel—past S. Lazzaro and Poveglia and the Lido, to the waters near San Clemente, whence Venice is seen in its most imposing aspect. But our holiday spirits sank; for it was hard to enjoy the view in hearing of the woful cries and lamentations issuing from that isle of unreason. For on San Clemente stands the asylum for female lunatics, and it was strange to hear some fellow-passengers extolling the size of the building without seeming to realize the extent of suffering implied by its hugeness. Pre-

ventible suffering, too, for the majority of the patients here and in the neighbouring hospital for males at St. Servolo are stricken by the *pellagra*, the disease which makes such fearful havoc among the poor wherever Indian corn is their only food. And during the years when this grain was subject to the grist tax and its augmented cost led to the use of damaged or adulterated flour, the number of cases was continually on the increase. It is sadder still to know that, although this canker may be checked in the early stage by means of nourishing diet, it is almost always incurable when it has once touched the brain, so that few *pellagrosi* ever quit these islands except for a narrower resting-place at San Michele. Thanks to shortsighted economists Italy has paid her debts with the bodies and brains of her agricultural masses !

More and more islets come in view, and we recognize the tower and trees of " St. George in the Seaweed " far away on the burnished mirror of the Dead Lagoon ! The steamer stops now at a little

jetty, and we see a confusion of brick walls, red roofs, and Venetian chimneys pierced by a narrow street leading to the dykes and fortifications behind. This is the village of Malamocco. The strip of land narrows fast, and the big vessels outside seem afloat in the shade of its trees.

Now a brand-new *trabacolo* skimmed past us Venice-bound. It had fair white sails, its rounded hull was painted with broad, red bands, and it bore a tight cargo of firewood stacked half-mast high. After touching at the station near Fort Alberoni and the lighthouse, we crossed the wide and winding harbour, and skirted the long stretch of dwellings beyond the grass-girt church of San Pietro. Squalid grey houses and squalid grey lanes and dishevelled women sitting on their doorsteps busy with distaff or lace pillow. Now we reach Pelestrina, a more thriving place, with an almost endless fringe of red-tinted houses, churches, and gardens bright with flowering oleanders and tamarisk plumes. Then at last the land tails off to its backbone, the great

marb'e dyke that curves far out into the open sea. And our voyage is nearly done ; the steamer begins to roll as we cross the blue waves of the harbour mouth and then regain smooth water close to the towers of Chioggia.

Like Venice, this fisher-town is built on a cluster of isles, and is sheltered from the sea by its miniature Lido, the island of Sottomarina out there by the harbour bar. No wonder that artists should flock to Chioggia, and paint and praise it unceasingly ! For truly no artistic rapture can be pitched too high for its worth. It is a very carnival of colour. It has a turquoise and sapphire sea set with many-hued flights of sails ; a broad street flooded with sunshine, lined with arcades and bright with streaming flags. It has shadowy alleys winding between balconied houses of the old Venetian red, crowned by Venetian chimneys, and leading to steep bridges over side canals. It has a clamorous, crowded fish market with marvellous effects of light and shade, where sea-treasures of every shape and

size and colour are stored in slippery heaps between massive stone pillars of fourteenth century Gothic. Here strange monsters, horned and clawed and shelled, and gelatinous *frutti di mare* are offered for sale by picturesque boys all grins and mischief, brown-skinned and bright-eyed ; and men and women chaffer and quarrel with much dramatic gesture and pose. Truly a wonderful place ! Befriended by fortune, we chanced on a street scene that would have sent a figure painter into an ecstasy of joy. A public auction of unredeemed pledges was going on at the door of the *Monte di Pietà*, attended by a crowd of spectators and an inner circle of well-to-do matrons. All wore the *tonda*, or white linen veil peculiar to the women of Chioggia. This curious article of attire is fastened round the waist like a petticoat and thrown over the head and shoulders. It is an excellent setting for the regular features, clear olive skins, brilliant eyes, and shining tresses of this handsome race, and is quite Oriental in effect. There were many beau-

tiful young girls in the crowd, and a few comely matrons. Even the very old women were cleaner, tidier, and less hag-like than those of the same class in Venice and the outlying villages. Yet these fisherfolk have a hard life of it, and the population is said to be decreasing. They all go to sea, and each year the sea claims its tale of victims.

It was interesting to watch the faces of these clustered women, as various trinkets were put up for sale. A stately old dame, seated in the place of honour by the auctioneer, fingered a pearl necklet with evident interest. Perhaps she wanted it for her daughter's trousseau. It seemed worth as much as the string clasped round her own brown throat. A young mother with a child in her arms craned forward from the edge of the circle with so wistful a look, that we wondered whether she might not be the original owner of those unredeemed pearls. She wore none of the usual ornaments, save some tawdry ear-rings, her *tonda* was soiled and her dress in rags.

Two spacious churches break the line of the arcaded main street, but they contain nothing of special interest. The fine Basilica and its ancient bell-tower are at the edge of the town at the end of this highway. The farther side of the church is flanked by the Piazza Vescovile, perhaps the most characteristic bit of this most pictorial city. The grassy space is shaded by lofty acacias festooned with tawny fishing nets. A rococo marble balustrade set with statues of saints and colossal baskets of fruit opens on to a narrow canal. The Basilica built by Longhena is in course of repair, and we found its grand interior strewn with rubbish, obstructed by monster scaffoldings and ringing with the strokes of workmen's tools. It has a noble choir, many mediocre paintings, and a very ornate pulpit. The intense midday heat checked our wish to pass the city gate to the many piered bridge that strides across to the mainland, and we crept back to our waterside inn, thankfully clinging to the shelter of the arcades. Rest was pleasant

beneath the wide verandah overlooking the jewelled lagoon. Nor did we fail to do justice to the local dish—a savoury compound of rice and fish with the untranslatable title of *pidocchi di mare*, which is thoroughly worthy of its fame.

Afterwards, like most visitors, we went out to sea in a *topo*, a roomy fishing-boat, with a ragged awning and patched brown sail, manned by a crew of four. Why four men to two passengers was at first a riddle, and none the less when it was seen that one devoted himself to conversation, another to slumber, a third to his pipe, and the fourth had the sole management of the craft.

A sweet scent of hay greeted us as we skimmed past the meadow-isle between Chioggia and its sandy suburb of Sottomarina. Here, landing by a row of squalid stone houses, we picked our way among pigsties, geese, and children to the giant sea-wall of the Murazzi, a grand dyke of marble blocks that thrust back the waves of the Adriatic. Then, returning by the outer edge of ten-islanded

Chioggia, we surveyed the great bridge leading to *terra firma*, and came down the San Domenico Canal, the ship-builders' quarter, where innumerable *topi*, *bragozze*, and *trabacoli* in different stages of construction and repair lined the waterside; where freshly-painted sails made warm patches of colour; sun-baked urchins dived and begged; and a clamorous chorus of female tongues recalled the scenes of Goldoni's "Baruffe Chiozzote." Then, across the lagoon to the harbour mouth a brisk breeze bore us swiftly out to sea, and we solved the riddle of our numerous crew. The conversationalist of the party, a thick-set, ruby-nosed mariner, blandly suggested that with this favouring wind we might sail to Venice or the Lido, or at least to Pelestrina in about a couple of hours. Surely the Signori could not wish to go back by the steamer? His comrades too became eloquent, and all were extremely disappointed by our mean preference for the punctuality of steam. The little plot having failed the whole crew leapt into activity, and made

a great show of occupation as though to justify the necessity of their presence.

Skimming across the bay in the direction of the mouths of the Adige, the colour of the water completely changed. The metallic blue of the lagoon and the green waves of the open sea were exchanged for luminous pale blue and white where the river water reluctantly mingled with the salt. On returning to Chioggia we had time for another scene of street life before our steamer gave its warning whistle. In a shady corner near the market we halted to watch an artist who was sketching a sleeping child. His work completed, he dropped some pence into his model's hand. The crowd of capering ragamuffins instantly dispersed, and we presently found them round the corner all stretched upon the ground and all fast asleep!

As the shadows lengthened the wind fell, the heat increased, and we steamed back to Venice over a breezeless sea of glass.

VII.

AT THE ARSENAL



At the Arsenal.



UNDER the spell of Venetian enchantment it is vain to try to remain in the nineteenth century. The web tightens daily, and a hundred silken strings draw you gently but firmly back into the past. You declare perhaps that you are sated with sights, content with everyday life, yet all scenes of everyday life in this wonderful city are rich in historic suggestion, are mere survivals, ghosts and phantasms of better and nobler things.

For instance, chancing one afternoon to row idly

across the Giudecca, we beheld rows upon rows of paintings hung outside a house and framed with flags and bannerets. This exhibition was in honour of the *fête* day of the champion rower of the *Nicolotti* faction. For many centuries the mariners and gondoliers of Venice have been divided into two parties, known as *Nicolotti* and *Castellani*, after the two extreme points of the city, San Niccolò and San Pietro di Castello. The former are distinguished by black sashes and caps, the latter by red. There has always been keen emulation between the two companies, although party spirit has never led to the faction-fights of other Italian cities. Their warfare is chiefly carried on in words, and regattas now afford them their only fields of contest. The open-air picture show at the Giudecca comprised portraits of victorious *Nicolotti* of many different periods. They had greater antiquarian than artistic merit, and showed successive changes of costume, ranging from slashed doublets and jerkins to flowered waist-

coats and knee-breeches, and again to the easy white dress of modern times. A few of the recent portraits were really good paintings, and one—that of a handsome, spirited youth, waving his emblem of triumph against a dark green background—was a very harmonious study of colour. The winner of perhaps last year's regatta! Surely that was quite of the nineteenth century? Nevertheless this poor little survival, the picture-decked house on a mean and dingy quay, called up a swarm of greater scenes. Did not red caps and black always fight for precedence in boarding Genoese and Turkish galleys, or storming pirate strongholds, and were not their rival feats and games prominent events in all the great festivals of the Republic? And on Holy Thursday, the day of yearly commemoration of the victory of the Venetians over the Patriarch of Aquileia in 1170, chosen bands of *Castellani* and *Niccolotti* performed their famous Labours of Hercules in presence of the Doge and all the authorities of the

State. Every game on that occasion was symbolic of triumph in war. The feats of Hercules, an acrobatic display of strength, represented the agility of the Venetians in climbing masts, boarding galleys, scaling fortress walls. The *Moresca* was a war dance, the fireworks the burning of the Patriarch's castles, while the bull-fight, ending with the skilful beheading of the unlucky animals, typified the final defeat of the Patriarch and the ignominious tribute exacted from him. In the same way, now-a-days, Doge and Senate, and Council of Ten, splendid patricians, multi-coloured masks, surging crowd, clashing bells and flourish of trumpets, are all recalled by a few yards of painted canvas, emblematic flags, tinkling of ice-tumblers and a handful of unexcited spectators.

But at last the nineteenth century asserted its strength and almost exorcised the ghost of ancient Venice by an essentially modern scene. This was the launch of an ironclad christened by the Queen. Half Venice was streaming across the lagoon and

down the Riva to the lion-guarded Arsenal door long before the gay little steam launch dashed through the bridge to the water-gate with its punctual cargo of royalty. It was true "queen's weather," the August sun tempered by a delicious breeze. A hurried walk through dusty yards, past countless workshops, brought us at last to the stands reserved for invited guests, facing the huge scarlet hulk upreared on a forest of timbers. Secured by miles of cordage and chains and beams, the *Amerigo Vespucci* seemed fixed for life on its monster crutches. Bands played, the crowd buzzed; all was stir and movement and expectation. A train of priests and acolytes, looking like flies at an elephant's feet, moved slowly round the iron-plated mass, and with prayer and holy water gave spiritual blessing to this type of material force.

Then an increased stir and murmur of the throng! Queen Margherita, fair and smiling, clad in shimmering satin and soft white lace, surrounded by a bevy of court ladies, and officials in embroidered

uniforms and plumed hats and followed by her little son arm in arm, with a very tall and stately matron, was seen ascending the platform built up under the bows of the unchristened vessel. Then, pulling a blue ribbon, the royal godmother dashed a bottle of champagne against a few inches of red paint amid a tempest of applause and the rollicking strains of the National Hymn. Then the procession having returned to the grand stand, officials began to fly hither and thither, gold lace glittered in the sun, plumes fluttered, words of command issued from the shade of the cocked hats. A few moments of silence, expectant silence, suddenly broken by a trumpet call, a few rapid axe-strokes, and, as if by magic, the first huge beam on either side of the ironclad slid from its place and was instantly tugged away by a swarm of men—much as Mr. Gulliver must have been dragged by his Lilliputian conquerors. A dozen times the trumpet sounded, a dozen times a buttress fell, until the eighty metres' length of scarlet iron was bare, un-

supported and only held in place by the hawsers and timbers at its bows. Now came a dead pause, the tongues of the crowd were still ; and the crew of workmen, high in air on the deck of the *Amerigo*, stirred neither hand nor foot. For the next moment would test the success of their patient labour. The chief carpenter mounted to the bows, his huge hatchet flashed in the sun, dealt a few mighty blows, and suddenly wood, iron, and cordage relaxed their grip, and lightly and easily as a paper boat, the *Amerigo Vespucci* glided stern foremost into the welcoming waves.

Perhaps none but eye-witnesses can realize the excitement of that moment, the contagious joy of successful achievement. Even now, after many months, a thrill runs through the writer's veins at the memory of that scene. No sublime nor beauteous scene to the outer eye ; for a mountain of painted metal, grimy workmen, calico-covered boards and a fashionable crowd have few elements of pictorial worth. But it was a triumph of human

skill, of mind over matter, and the burst of nineteenth-century enthusiasm was probably equal to that of republican Venice, when the war galley built in one day was launched from the same spot in honour of Henry III., monarch of France and Poland.

This was our last Venetian spectacle, and with it this record of summer diversions may fitly come to a close.



